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SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST, 1957

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BATTLE OUT OF TIME

by Dwight V. Swain



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The Editorial

DID you ever stop to think that all the current talk about man achieving space flight might not be simply a matter of "new frontiers of adventure" but a point of eventual survival?

NO, we don't mean there is any scientific evidence that the planet Earth may suffer an early demise. But the possibility exists that mankind may eventually make the planet a graveyard for his race. How can this be? Well, it could easily come about from a normally unexpected problem—lack of water.

SINCE the Earth's surface is predominantly water this may seem to be a ridiculous assumption. However, it must be remembered that most of Earth's water is not fresh, but salt. And thus far the vast areas of salt water have not been economically practicable sources for man's needs. Perhaps they will be someday—through necessity—but they are not now. And our fresh water supplies are being taxed to a dangerous point due to increases in population, industrial expansions, and the resultant usage and pollution problems.

FACED with the fact that the world's population is on a vast increase for the years ahead, and that industry is going to go anywhere but on the downgrade, one

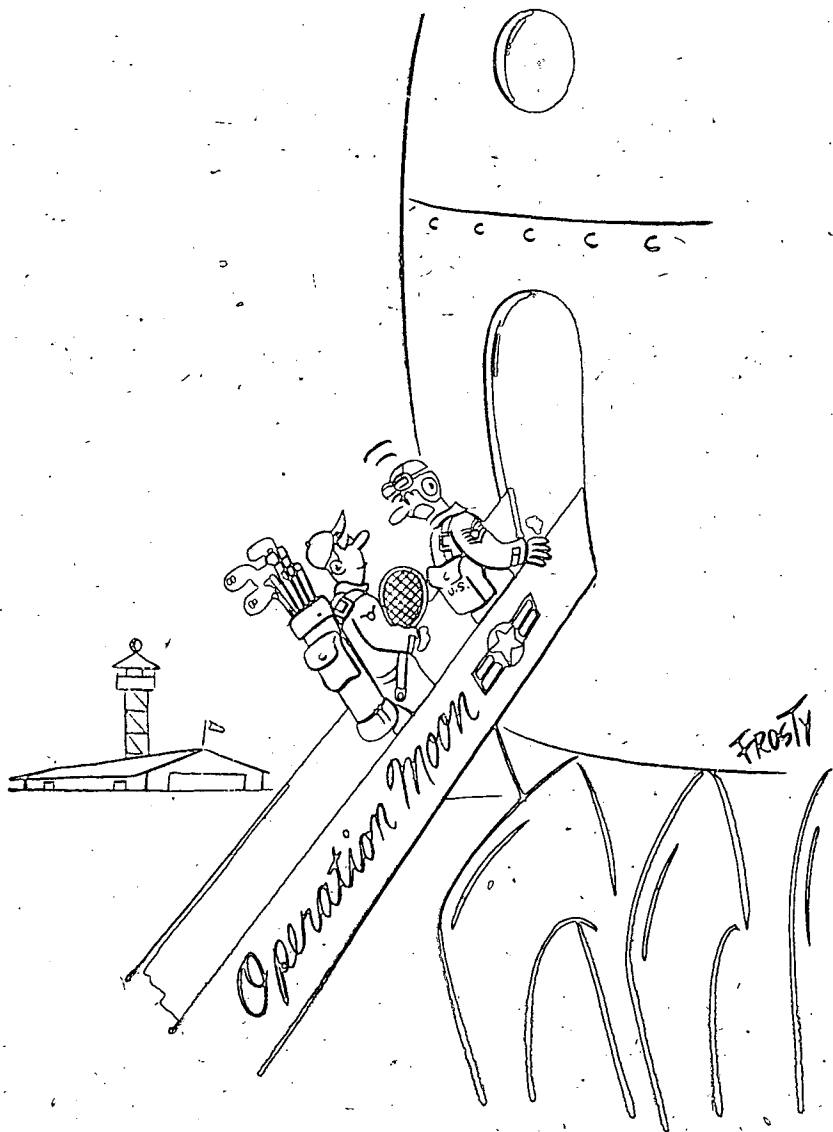
can extrapolate to the point where survival may hinge on a supply of our most common commodity—water.

SCIENTISTS have speculated for years on the "canals" of the planet Mars. Assuming for this discussion that they are indeed canals, one can speculate on the possible fate suffered by its inhabitants in ages gone by. A canal's purpose, of course, would be the channeling of water for specific needs. Since the Martian "canals" appear to be efforts to channel water from polar areas, the need for the water would tend to be one not of transportation and commerce, but consumption.

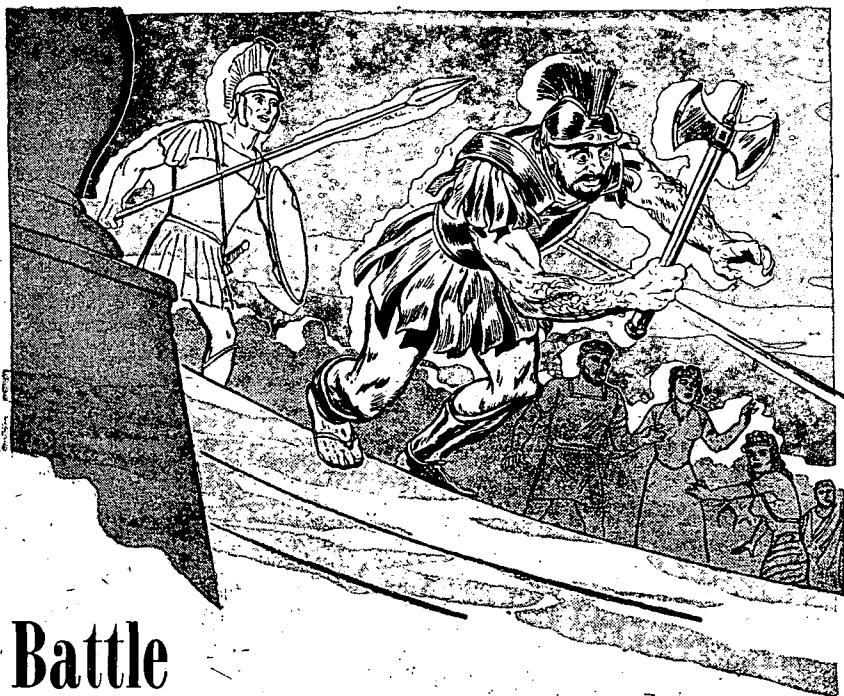
DID indeed the inhabitants of Mars vanish due to a lack of water? Perhaps. Until we get there to see at first hand we can only speculate. We may even find that life still exists on Mars—but limited to a handful rather than teeming millions, again, because of water supply.

CERTAINLY Earth's population is in no imminent danger—perhaps none at all—yet the problem of water exists and cannot be avoided or denied. Space flight, of course, may provide an instantaneous solution to the problem if it ever becomes critical. There's Venus up there, offering vast oceans of the stuff. It's a comforting thought!

.... wlv



"Aren't you taking a lot for granted, Frumply?"



Battle Out Of Time

by Dwight V. Swain

AN UTTER DARK lay upon the hills outside the palace now, moonless and with clouds drawn heavy all across the Cretan sky.

Wind, too, had come with the night, rising till Burke found himself fearing for the shutters. The lamps flared on their stands with each new gust and draft. Light flickered orange and yellow on

Ariadne's lovely face, eddying through the shadows so that the tentacles of the frescoed octopi on the walls seemed to writhe and twist and turn. . .

Burke laughed without mirth. It was that mad a moment.

And that dangerous.

For while he might find temporary cover here with Ariadne, in these private quarters beyond the



Burke knew of the ancient Bronze Age and its legend of the dread Minotaur. But he didn't know he was about to become a vital part of it!

Queen's Megaron, death yet bayed at his heels.

Already, bearded King Minos himself no doubt paced some other palace hall—thirsting for Burke blood; raging in jealous fury that any outlander should dare aspire to his lovely daughter.

That slaving Greek lecher, Theseus, too—it was lucky he lay dead drunk there in the corner. Sober, and confronted with a rival, he'd kill just to salve his wounded ego.

And then, as if that were not enough of peril, there was . . . the other.

Involuntarily, Burke shuddered.

What chance did a mere human have, pitted against the dark craft of the alien? Where could he hope to find the strength and skill and insight to win over the strange horror from beyond the void?

Yet with Ariadne's life at stake, Earth's whole future in the balance, how could he turn back?

No; he had no choice but to press on; seek out and challenge the might of that nightmare monster men called the Minotaur.

He couldn't help find it surprising, though, that in the face of such he still had it in him to notice the play of light on decorative motifs. Truly, the strange twist of mind that seemed to pervade this weird Mediterranean realm had claimed him for its own!

But to dare the Labyrinth, the Minotaur . . .

Almost without thinking, Burke rested a hand on the worn Smith & Wesson in his belt; then, bleakly, laughed again.

Ariadne moved uneasily beside him. Her words came halting and uncertain: "You—you are amused, my lord Dionysus . . .?"

Irritation boiled up in Burke—quick anger that he should have let himself forget even for a moment the desperate urgency of his task. How could he play the fool so—here, now, at a time when every breath, every second, brought inevitable disaster closer?

It added up to tension that had to find an outlet. Savagely, he lashed out at Ariadne: "For the hundredth time, girl: I'm not Dionysus, not a god. I'm Dion Burke, that's all. A man, like any other—"

Hurt came to the great dark eyes. A tear-mist veil blurred the glow of awe and adoration. The soft lips quivered.

But only for a moment. Then, contritely, the girl bowed her head. Jet ringlets glistened in the lamp-light. Bringing up slim hands, she crossed them upon the firm young breasts that she wore bared in the traditional Minoan style. "Your pardon, my lord . . ."

Burke breathed in sharply. As swiftly as it had come, his anger died. Of a sudden he wanted noth-

ing so much as to take the girl in his arms and draw her to him . . . solace her, soothe her, hold her with a thousand tender carresses through the endless hours of this long, black night.

Why was it always so between him and Ariadne? What was there about this slim Minoan princess that the very sight of her should make his firmest resolves melt? The women he'd known in his own world—they'd been wiser, wittier; more beautiful, even, perhaps, by an objective standard. Yet not even the one who'd hurt him most and helped to precipitate him into this fool's mission had stirred him a tenth as much as Ariadne.

With a curse, he reached out, pulled her to him.

She came willingly, nestling against him, her lithe body soft and warm.

For a long moment, Burke held her close.

Only then, over in the corner, brawny, bull-necked Theseus stirred and shifted. A noisy, wine-sodden snore broke from his open mouth.

Burke stiffened.

Like an echo, Ariadne's lovely oval face lifted from his shoulder. "My lord! You do not still feel anger—?"

BURKE SHOOK his head. "Forget it, princess. It's just I'm

all on edge. There's not much time—"

He broke off; brought up his wrist and strained to read the watch-face.

And that was good for another wry, twisted shadow of smile: a watch, here in Bronze Age Crete . . . product of the United States of America, vintage 1954 A. D., wrenched 5,000 miles and 3300 years out of its place and time. An anachronism to end all anachronisms.

Or no, that wasn't quite true.

For surely he himself was a greater anachronism than the watch, even.

The bare facts alone would drive an obituary writer crazy: "Dion Burke, archaeologist extraordinary without portfolio; born, Erie, Pa., August 9, 1929; disappeared April 14, 1957; died at Knossos, in the Great Palace of Minos, mightiest sea-king of Crete, on some vague, early spring date in the vicinity of 1400 B. C."

Only no obituary writer would ever hear those facts. The watch, the gun, the lighter—they'd all have sifted away to rusty dust long before Sir Arthur Evans and his fellow-scholars came this way.

Not that that mattered. Not now; not while he still had a job to do.

He moved his wrist closer to the nearest of the flickering lamps,

and strained again to read the watch.

Almost 10:30. Little more than an hour-and-a-half till midnight and the moment of Knossos' doom.

Sometime between now and then, he had to meet the Minotaur.

For a moment he held the slim girl in his arms even closer than before. Then, ever so gently, he moved her back away a fraction; lifted her small, satin-smooth chin. "Ariadne. . ."

"Yes, my lord?"

"There's a thing I must do now, Ariadne. An important thing, for both of us." A pause. "I need your help to do it."

"My help—?" The dark eyes widened. "My lord knows he has only to command. What must I do?"

Carefully, Burke picked his words; strove to hold the tension from his voice: "Among the people of this palace, there's one called Daedalus. You know him?"

"Daedalus the Smith, you mean?" The jet ringlets danced as the girl laughed. "Of course I know him. He's chief of all my father's craftsmen. What is it you seek of him?"

Again, Burke weighed his words. "Some talk, that's all. A chance to ask a few questions."

"Talk—at this hour?" Ariadne stared.

"I have no choice," Burke shrug-

ged. "To see him by daylight would be as much as my life is worth."

"Oh."

"Yes." Time for a smile now, Burke decided. His most engaging smile: "You see, there are things the man knows, things his skill's taught him—"

Ariadne stiffened in the same instant. "Things Daedalus knows—?" For the first time, her voice held an edge, dark shadows of suspicion. "How could a smith know anything that means so much? What might he say that my lord Dion had not already heard a thousand times?"

"What—?" Burke felt his smile go stiff. "Why—why, many things—his skills, his artifices—" He groped and fumbled.

"No!" In a flash all Ariadne's humility of manner vanished. She thrust Burke's restraining arm aside, defiance in the gesture. "Do you think me a fool, my lord Dion? Daedalus the Smith holds but one secret that such as you might seek to learn. One only!"

Burke stood ever so still.

Ariadne spat like a cat. "You seek the secret of the Labyrinth, my lord! You would stalk the Minotaur in his very lair! Waste no breath trying to lull me with denials!"

Burke sighed. A weary sigh, heavy with the knowledge of all the things he could not change.

And, from Ariadne: "What makes you think you're destined to succeed, where each year fourteen others fail? How dare you hope to live, when the monster that is the Minotaur has slain the mightiest warriors of all Athens?"

How, indeed? Of a sudden, Burke wanted no more of such questions.

He cut in flat and hard: "Shut up, wench!"

The girl stopped as short as if he'd slapped her. Her face paled with anger.

Only then, as she stared up at Burke, that too passed, and a mask of sudden fear came to replace the fury. Her naked breasts lifted with a quick, indrawn breath. She fell back an uncertain step. . . another. . . another. . . "My lord—Dionysus—"

Burke laughed harshly. "All right. Call me that if you want to." And then, tight-lipped: "Because make up your mind to it, you're going to do what I say as if I were your whole damn' pantheon!"

He closed in.

THE GIRL PRESSED back against the wall now—white to the lips, dark eyes distended. "Dion—Dion Burke—"

Burke gripped her wrist. "Is it agreed, then? You'll do what I tell you?"

His lovely captive winced as he

twisted. "But — my lord — the Minotaur — Dion, it will slay you!"

"Maybe. And then again, maybe not." Burke brushed a hand against the revolver in his waistband. "You see, I won't be on quite the same spot as those others who died, Ariadne. I've reserved a couple of special Dionysan thunderbolts to try out on your monster, patent of two subsidiary gods named Smith & Wesson."

"But Daedalus—he's my father's man, Lord Dion, chief of all the palace craftsmen. He'd never help you, even if you could reach him."

"I'll reach him. And he'll help me."

"But why, my lord? Why risk it?" A sudden taut, eager note crept into Ariadne's voice. With her free hand, she smoothed the fabric of Burke's shirt. "Don't you see? There's no need—not when you've the power to come here as you have tonight, in spite of all my father's guards! Under his very sword, we can be lovers—"

Burke smiled bleakly. "I'm sorry, princess. I wish it were that simple."

"But it is!" Now Ariadne's lithe young body once more was tight against his. "I want you to come, my lord Dion! I welcome you—"

"I know. And. . . I love you too." For the fraction of a second Burke let his arms tighten around

her.

Then, abruptly, he pushed back; gripped her shoulders. "You see, I can't just come and go at will, the way you seem to think I can. And even if I could, it wouldn't help."

"It would not—?" Blank bafflement spread across Ariadne's lovely face:

"Not after tonight."

Puzzled eyes. A wordless question.

Burke said tightly, "By tomorrow there won't be any Knossos. The Great Palace here, the shrines, the other buildings—as of midnight tonight, less than an hour-and-a-half from now, they'll all be destroyed."

Tension, spiraling higher with each passing second.

Burke said, "Now you know why I came tonight, Ariadne: because this is the last chance I'll ever have. I've got to get you out of here, now or never. That's why I have to see Daedalus, and go into the Labyrinth, and meet the Minotaur and kill it."

Still the silence echoed.

A numb despair seeped through Burke. Bleakly, he wondered how he ever had been fool enough to think his words might spark response in a Bronze Age mind, or that any such mad enterprise as this could possibly end otherwise than in disaster.

Only then, while he watched, once more Ariadne bowed her head and crossed her hands upon her breasts. Her words came low, submissive: "The quarters of Daedalus: the Smith lie close at hand, my lord."

She turned as she spoke.

Heart pounding, Burke walked with her towards the doorway.

CHAPTER II

THERE WAS A GUARD in the corridor beyond the Queen's Megaron.

Wordless, Burke flicked a glance at Ariadne.

Her dark eyes flashed a dare-devil acceptance of the challenge. Sliding past him, she swung the heavy door back so it hid him, then leaned against it, body arched in practiced coquetry.

The spearman outside straightened just a fraction. His chest swelled and his belly drew in.

Slowly, Ariadne's full lips curved in a smile that was all invitation. Her hand came up to smooth her hair as she turned, twisting and preening. Then, still unspeaking, and with one last lingering glance over her shoulder, she drew back into her own apartment.

The guard's head swiveled as his eyes followed her.

Ariadne laughed softly from the shadows. Her long skirt swirled and rustled.

The guard's breath rasped in the stillness. For an instant he hesitated, peering down the hall in both directions. Then, eagerly, he crossed the threshold and moved with swift steps towards the princess.

Burke waited till the man was clear of the door. Then, savagely, the Smith & Wesson flat on the palm of his hand, he stepped forth from his hiding place and smashed a blow to the back of the other's neck.

The guard's knees hinged. He spilled to the floor.

Burke snapped, "Quick! Cords! A gag!"

The shrill, nerve-jangling squeal of cloth tearing echoed. Deftly, Ariadne thrust strips from a drape into his hands.

Burke bound and gagged the guard, then straightened and strode across the room to where bull-necked, snoring Theseus lay, the stench of sour wine still thick about him.

Ariadne came close. "More cloth, my lord?"

Burke prodded the Greek ungently with his toe, without response; then once more glanced at his watch.

Ten forty-five now.

And that left only an hour-and-a-quarter more, at best.

The back of Burke's neck prickled. "Forget it," he clipped. "The

Hero of Athens is too drunk to turn over, even, let alone give us trouble."

"This way, then," the girl said. Her voice all at once was not too steady, and the hand that gripped Burke's showed a tendency to tremble.

Together, they made their way from the apartment, down the corridor past a row of great painted jars and, finally, out onto the long ascending ramp that led to the palace's central court.

Now Ariadne turned right, keeping to the shadows of the colonnaded buildings past which they moved.

Close behind her, gun in hand, Burke tried to watch all ways at once. Every rattling stone, every wind-tossed branch against the cloud-blocked sky, became for him a trigger for new tension. Once, when the shadows behind him flickered, he almost persuaded himself that Theseus must be on their heels. Or perhaps, somehow, they'd caught the attention of another of old Minos' guards. . .

Again Ariadne veered right. A door creaked as she put her shoulder to it.

This corridor was so black Burke had to grip the girl's hand to keep contact with her.

More doors. More halls. More rooms. The place was like a maze—the very Labyrinth itself.

Yet not once did Ariadne hesitate. Swift, sure, she led Burke on and on through one murky chamber after another.

Then, as they rounded a final corner, a block of greyness came to mark the end of a passage. In seconds, they were once more out into the open and the night.

Ariadne paused and pointed.

"That's the place," she whispered.

"Daedalus' quarters?"

"Yes."

Narrow-eyed, Burke studied the looming bulk a moment. Then, tight-lipped, he strode towards the geometric shadows that marked the entrance.

But now Ariadne caught his arm. "Please, my lord Dion—let me be the one to talk to Daedalus."

"Let you—?" Burke stared. "But why?"

"You wish him to speak, do you not—to tell you the things you seek to learn?"

"Do I want him to talk—?" Burke spoke between clenched teeth. "Believe me, it's more than that, Princess. He's got to!"

The girl laughed softly in the darkness; and somehow there was a ring of steel beneath the velvet. "That's why I must be the one to face him, Lord Dion!"

WITHOUT WAITING for further word from Burke,

she stepped forward and knocked upon the door.

No answer. After a moment, she knocked again.

This time, a faint stir of sound rose from within. Then, abruptly, the door opened, framing a brawny, bearded man who glowered out at Burke and the girl from below a sputtering, hand-held lamp.

Uncowed, without hesitation, Ariadne stepped forward. "Come, Daedalus!" she chided smoothly. "Would you leave your master's daughter standing here wind-whipped on your threshold in the night?"

The belligerence vanished from Daedalus' face, replaced by an impassive, noncommittal mask. For an instant his eyes flicked to Burke. Then he stepped back heavily; opened the door wider. "Enter, my princess. What brings you to my poor quarters at this hour of the night?"

Uninvited, ignoring the hostility that gleamed in their host's deep-set eyes, Burke followed Ariadne in and closed the door behind them.

Simultaneously, the girl said, "It was a terrible thing for you to do, Daedalus! Did my father know it, he'd have you flayed alive!"

Even Burke rocked back on his heels: the words were that much of a shock, that unexpected. . . . cool, conversational, without pre-

liminary.

As for the smith, he stood very still. The deep-set eyes seemed to retreat yet further into the broad, high-domed skull.

"And what is this terrible thing of which you speak, Princess Ariadne?" he asked finally.

"What is it —?" Ariadne's eyes distended, then narrowed. Her voice took on a taut, dangerous note. "Do you think to mock me, artisan? Me, daughter of Minos, favored beyond all women of this realm?"

Daedalus' hairy chest rose and fell in heavy, almost deliberate rhythm. Turning, he crossed with short, clumping steps to the nearest stand and set down his lamp, then made a small business of straightening the wick.

"What black slander is this, princess?" he asked coldly, eyes still on the flame. "What are you trying to say I've done?"

"Would you deny it, then?" Like a sleek cat stalking, Ariadne moved round him in a long, slow arc. "Or do you seek perhaps to saddle poor Icarus with the blame?"

"Icarus—!" The smith's head lifted sharply. "Whatever this deed is that you speak of, my son had nothing to do with it!"

"Do you count it nothing for a youth to enter secretly into my apartment, then assault a guard when he's surprised?" Ariadne's

lovely face fixed into a mask of scorn. "Ambition ill becomes you, Daedalus. For a man who'd plot such a thing, risk his own son's life to gain power over me, you show little courage and less sense."

Before Burke's eyes, sweat came to the smith's broad forehead. A tremor ran through the heavy hands. "May the gods bear witness, Ariadne, you know I've done no such, and so does your father!"

"And of course he'll take your word over his own daughter's." Ariadne laughed without mirth. "Tell me, smith, are you such a fool as to think your fiend's work with my mother, Pasiphae, is so soon forgotten?" And then: "Besides, you know all the secrets of the palace—a dangerous knowledge. My father will leap at an excuse to slay you!"

Daedalus rubbed at his beard with thick, scarred knuckles. His lips had a dry, parched look, and his breathing was ragged and uneven.

Coolly, Ariadne turned and walked away from him, to Burke. "Come, my lord Dion! Let us waste no more time on this numbskull."

Daedalus' head seemed to sink down between his great shoulders. Through clenched teeth, he said, "All right, curse you! What is it you want?"

"What do you mean, smith?"

The girl stayed remote as some slim statue. "Are your wits slipping? You know I've asked for nothing."

Head high, a picture of poise, she moved towards the door. Stiffly, Burke fell in behind her.

For a moment, Daedalus stood flat-footed, rigid.

Then, abruptly, he too was moving towards the door. For the first time, his voice held a raw, uncertain edge, as if touched with panic. "Princess—most favored of Minos—please—"

Ariadne paused. Her dark eyes glinted soaring triumph in the instant that they touched Burke's. "Please indeed, Daedalus! After all, I came here tonight but to satisfy a whim. This outlander,"—a gesture to Burke—"vows there's no access to the Labyrinth, the Minotaur, save by the Shrine of Oracles.

"For my part, I argued that you, who laid out that whole area of the palace, could enter any chamber, no matter how well the doors were guarded." A shrug. "All the talk—it ended in a wager. So, now, I count on you to prove me right, show some secret way by which, if necessary, a determined man could invade even the Minotaur's most secret precinct undetected."

The beads of sweat on the smith's broad forehead began to merge into rills and trickle down into his eye-

brows. "Princess, were I to tell this outlander such a secret—believe me, you ask me to gamble with my life!"

"Yet if you do not tell," Ariadne retorted calmly, "what will happen will involve no gamble!"

SECONDS TICKED by while the heavy-thewed chief of craftsmen stared at her. Then, bleakly, he said, "Very well, princess."

Another long pause, with Daedalus frowning and tugging at his lower lip.

At last: "The only unguarded way to the Minotaur leads through the drainage system, the great sewer-pipes that lie beneath the palace."

Burke frowned. "You mean, you'd drop through a manhole here—anywhere on the grounds—and then come up again inside the Labyrinth?"

"Exactly," the smith nodded.

"But how would you know when you reached the right exit?"

"Only one connects with the Labyrinth. A cage of bars cuts off the pipe at that point, so no workman may by accident come up within the Labyrinth and thus meet his doom."

Narrow-eyed, Burke brooded on the things the smith had told him.

But now Ariadne broke in, and all the poise she'd shown brief mo-

ments earlier had vanished: "Dion — you mustn't! Don't you see? This is a trap. Even though you were to slay the Minotaur, you'd never find your way back to safety through all that maze of pitch-black tunnels!"

"On the contrary, princess." Burke smiled thinly. "This is one advantage of coming here from another time. It tells me in advance so many of the things that are scheduled to happen."

Ignoring her obvious blank bafflement, he again spoke to the smith: "Daedalus, do you have cord here — light, strong line such as you use in laying out the walls of each new building?"

"Yes."

"Then get some for me."

The brawny craftsman crossed to a chest against the wall; brought out a thick skein of twine. "Will this do?"

"Is it long enough to guide me to the Labyrinth?"

"Yes."

"Then that's all I need from you." Burke turned to go.

"Wait!" This from Ariadne. Her dark eyes pinned their host's deep-set orbs. "Daedalus, I've a promise to make you."

"A promise —?"

"A vow, if you will." Never had Ariadne looked more beautiful — or more deadly. Her smile held the shadow of impending doom. "For,

if there's any trick to this, smith, or if word should reach my father of what's happened here tonight, I swear an hour will come when you'll pray for death to end your agonies!"

Then she and Burke were out in the night again, silent as shadows, feeling their way back through the murky maze of alleyways and corridors and buildings to the central court.

Burke pulled the girl to a halt there, in the narrow slot between two pillars. "Where are we going?" He held his voice low; spoke with his mouth close to her ear to compensate for the buffeting of the wind. "We can't chance your rooms, you know. That guard's snapped out of it by now."

"Of course. I've a place in mind across the court, closer to the shrine."

"All right, then."

But again, as before, tension rose within Burke. A guard's shouted challenge somewhere far off started him sweating. When the low, mingled laughter of a man and a woman drifted from a nearby window, he froze in his tracks.

The role of hero, he decided, ill became him. He thought too much of consequence and peril; found it too difficult to lose himself in an emotional haze of recklessness.

Yet here, now, he had no choice

— not feeling the way he did about Ariadne; not knowing the things he knew from that brief session before the inverter's scanning screen.

And the time remaining was so short . . . less than an hour, as of this moment.

"This way, my lord Dion."

Wordless, once more Burke fell in behind the girl.

Their destination proved to be an ornate suite where Burke stumbled over furniture in the darkness.

Ariadne squeezed his hand. "No one will disturb us here — those who occupy this apartment are visiting at Phaestos." And then, changing position: "I've a lamp. Give me fire."

Burke fumbled out his lighter; flicked the wheel.

The flame showed his companion close beside him. In seconds, the lamp she held was sputtering to life.

The girl turned quickly. "There's a manhole back here, in the ante-room to the bath."

She led Burke to it as she spoke; held the lamp low so he could see the cover-slab.

Dropping to his knees, he heaved the heavy stone aside.

Instantly, new air-currents swirled about him. A mustiness assailed his nostrils.

Somewhere, along that black tube below or another like it, the Mino-

taur was waiting.

A KNOT DREW TIGHT in the pit of Burke's stomach. Rising, he tossed Daedalus' thick skein of cord down by the base of the nearest lamp-stand, then faced Ariadne.

"Thank you for your help, my princess," he said gently. "Now, though, it's time for you to go."

"To go —?" She stared at him, dark eyes suddenly wide. "What play is this, my lord Dion? Surely you'd not ask me to leave you now, in the hour when your worst danger is upon you?"

Burke forced a wry smile. "Do you remember what happened the other time when you refused to carry out my orders?"

"You mean — when you hit me?" Gingerly, the girl's fingers moved along her bruised jaw as she spoke.

"Precisely."

"But my lord Dion —"

Burke stopped smiling. "I'm sorry, Ariadne. You're not going with me. That's final. If you try, if you won't promise to go back to your own apartment, I'll knock you out and tie you up. Is that clear?"

He started forward as he finished — face set, fist doubled.

But the girl gave not an inch before him. Stepping in, instead, she stood very close, face upturned

to his.

"My lord Dion," she said softly, "I tell you now: you're the bravest man I've ever seen."

It threw Burke off balance. He could find no words with which to answer.

The girl said, "I promise you, you needn't worry for me; a warrior should not have to think of women, or fear for them. I'll await you at my own apartment."

Burke groped. "Ariadne —"

It was as if he hadn't spoken: "Remember, you have my promise. But if anything should go wrong, if I'm missing when you reach my quarters — Lord Dion, do you know the River of Amnissus?"

"Yes, of course."

"To its left, where it meets the sea, a headland rises. So, if fate decrees that I must flee from Knossos, you can expect to find me there."

Her slim, soft arms were round his neck, then; her lips on his for a long, pulsing moment.

When it ended, she was sobbing; her cheeks tear-streaked.

"Dion . . ." she choked. "Please my Lord Dion; come back to me! Without you —"

She broke off; whirled and fled.

For a long, long moment, Burke stared after her, straining his eyes against the black encroachment of the night.

Then, abruptly, he dropped to

one knee and set to looping one end of Daedalus' cord around the lamp-stand — tying it tight; tugging and testing it.

Sound stirred behind him, a faint whisper.

Burke bit down hard. — "Damn you, Ariadne!"

No answer.

Another fragment of sound. A footstep.

A footstep far too heavy to be Ariadne's.

Burke went rigid; started to turn.

Only before he could even bring his eyes up, something clouted him a terrific blow to the side of the head, so hard it knocked him clear off his feet and against the wall beside him.

Desperately, he tried to roll clear, get his gun out.

But his eyes blurred. His head rang. A sandaled foot kicked the Smith & Wesson out of his fumbling fingers before the weapon had hardly cleared his waistband.

And now, a tremendous weight crashed down upon him. Blows rained to his face, his rib-cage, his belly. A knee drove for his groin. Cable-muscled fingers clutched his windpipe.

Burke choked on his own tongue. The fingers cut off his breath. His head spun. His chest heaved — lungs aflame, convulsing in agony.

Then spidery tendrils of blackness seeped into his brain. His will to fight ebbed. He felt himself drifting away, as on a swift-flowing stream that plunged into a cave's dark, swirling shadows.

Cautiously, the fingers relaxed on his windpipe.

Burke fought for breath in short, tremulous gasps. He didn't have the strength in him even to fill his lungs fully, let alone try to renew the battle.

The fingers left his throat and fumbled at his wrists; then his ankles.

Burke began to get better control of his breathing. Forcing himself to ignore his aching head and battered body, he pried his eyes open.

Bull-necked Theseus squatted by his side, leering down at him. The Greek gripped the Smith & Wesson in one hand, and every line of his face and stance mirrored gloating triumph.

Cold with rage — or was it partly panic? — Burke stared up at his captor. But when he tried to move his arms to lift himself, he found that they were bound together.

Beside him, the Athenian chuckled unpleasantly. "That Minos is smart, isn't he?"

Burke stared. "Minos —?"

"Sure. He told me I'd catch you if I just played drunk long

enough." The other's smirk broadened. "That's how much he hates you, see? He said he'd let me and the others go, forget all that crazy stuff with the Minotaur. All I had to do was grab you before you could sneak away someplace with Ariadne."

It was all Burke could do to keep from groaning.

If Theseus noticed, he ignored it. "Me, I've got a better idea. Something really clever. You'll love it."

A small chill ran through Burke. He still didn't speak.

Theseus said, "You want to get at the Minotaur so rotten much — well, I'm just the boy to help you do it, now you've worked all the details out with that Daedalus and Ariadne." A leer. "We'll handle it just the way you planned it: drop into the sewer-tunnel here, then hunt till we find the man-hole into the Labyrinth."

The burly Greek got up as he finished. "All right. On your feet!"

By way of emphasis, he kicked Burke in the stomach.

Retching, Burke lurched over to a face-down position and tried to rise.

STUMBLING ERECT proved difficult enough. Then, on his feet at last, he discovered that his captor had hobbled his ankles also, so he could move only in short, awkward steps.

Now the Athenian gestured to the open manhole that led into the sewer. "Hurry it up! Get down there!"

Awkwardly, Burke shuffled towards the opening.

Apparently he moved too slowly for his captor's tastes, for a sandaled foot took a leg from under him and he spilled to the floor and half-fell through the hole.

Then he was down in the cool, drafty blackness of the great drain. A moment later, Theseus joined him, a lamp in one hand, Deadalus' cord in the other. The revolver he'd taken from Burke was thrust into his loin-band.

Together, with Burke pushed into the lead, they moved along the tunnel.

It was a nightmare, after that — a nightmare of slime and smells, sudden winds and water. Snakes slithered across Burke's feet. Cobwebs brushed his face. The lamp's gleam was a pinprick in an infinity of darkness. A dozen times they struck dead ends; retraced their steps out of blind alleys. And each time Theseus raged with greater fury, till Burke's back and hips were numb with blows and kicks and buffets.

And then, suddenly, they came to a place where a cage of bars blocked off the passage.

Burke's heart leaped. A tight band seemed to constrict his chest.

But before he could even speak, Theseus elbowed him aside with new blows and curses. The Hero of Athens was breathing hard; even by the lamp's feeble light, his eyes showed distended.

Looping the heavy skein of twine over his shoulder, the Greek now gripped the nearest bar in a brawny hand and shook it.

It didn't even quiver.

Snarling, Theseus stepped back and, lifting the lamp, scrutinized the terra cotta of the tunnel wall till he found a crack-formed ledge wide enough to hold the light. Then, returning to the bars, he seized one in both hands and heaved on it while he braced a foot against another.

Still nothing happened.

Again the Athenian heaved, and this time every muscle along his back and arms and legs swelled. His belly drew into heavy ridges. Veins stood out at throat and temple.

For the instant, even Burke couldn't help but watch fascinated at the picture of sheer physical strength displayed.

And now, ever so slowly, one of the bars began to bend . . . the merest fraction . . . an inch . . . a hand's breadth . . .

Then, suddenly, with a dull metallic twang, the piece tore loose from its fitting.

The sound broke Burke's spell.

Convulsively, he strained at the bonds that held his own wrists.

They only cut deeper into the flesh.

And there was so little time . . .

Warily, Burke cast a sidewise glance at the revolver, still hanging at the other's waist. Then, as casually as he could manage it, he started moving closer.

Now, paunting with exertion, Theseus turned his attention to a second bar.

This time, he had more room to maneuver. Almost from the first moment, the metal showed signs of twisting.

Burke took yet another sidling step — a step that brought him within arm's reach of the Smith & Wesson. Clumsily, he poised, readying himself to spear out for the butt with both hands as one.

A groan escaped Theseus as he wrenched at the reluctant bar with all his might. Little by little, the heavy metal bent.

Burke snatched for the gun.

Only as he did so, incredibly, the weapon wasn't there. His hands slapped Theseus sweat-greased side instead.

Simultaneously, a fist like a maul smashed him full in the face: The Athenian's harsh laughter rang in his ears. He crashed back against the sewer-pipe's wall like a doll flung aside by an angry child. Words hammered at him; Theseus'

words: "I wondered when you'd try that, you outlander dog!"

It was all Burke could do to keep his feet, let alone answer.

THE GREEK SNARLED
 "Now's a good time to tell you the rest of it, too, rack you!"

Burke tried to blink away the haze between them. "The rest of it — ?" he mumbled.

"That's right; the rest." His captor gloated openly now. "You didn't think I dragged you through this hell-hole just for entertainment, did you, when all I needed to do to get rid of you was hand you over to Minos?"

Burke didn't answer.

Theseus scowled, spoke almost as if to himself; "That slut Ariadne — I'll teach her to scorn me for an outlander! Once I've shoved you up through this manhole into the Labyrinth, where there's no chance for anyone but the Minotaur to find you, alive or dead, I'm going to go explain to Minos all about how you took me unawares and almost killed me, back there in Ariadne's quarters. He'll believe me, because it fits right in with what that guard you tricked will tell him.

"Then, while Minos has everyone out hunting for you, I'll take Ariadne down to where my ship lies anchored at the mouth of the Amnissus. By the time Minos

realizes what's happened, I'll be gone, with his daughter with me; and she'll be good for nothing but to be queen of Athens, so he'll have no choice but to make peace with my father, no matter how it galls him."

The hair along the back of Burke's neck prickled. Of a sudden he saw how he'd vastly underestimated Theseus. Because the man looked like a handsome, stupid, dissipated block of beef, Twentieth-Century intellect had sneered at him.

Only Theseus had a schemer's brain, as well as a Greek God's face and physique. And what looked like stupidity came out as an almost oriental taste for the unprettier types of vengeance.

All of which added up to nothing less than disaster.

Keeping his voice level with an effort, Burke said, "Theseus, you hate me, and I don't blame you for it. For that matter, I hate you too.

"But right now, there's no time for either of us to indulge his feelings. This is too big for that. Knossos falls tonight. It's going to be destroyed — soon now, within the hour.

"Unless we kill the Minotaur, Ariadne dies too. There'll even be other Minotaurs, not just here but all over the world. That's why I wanted to get into the Labyrinth — "

Laughter exploded in Burke's face.

It was a better answer than words. Tight-lipped, Burke groped frantically for some new plan, some trick, some lingering straw of hope to cling to.

Theseus said, "Don't worry, outlander. You'll get your chance at the Minotaur."

He stalked forward as he spoke; poised a doubled fist close by Burke's jaw: "Just remember, though: while you're taking care of the monster, I'll be taking care of Ariadne!"

The poised fist lashed out. When Burke tried to jerk his head aside, Theseus' other hand came up in a casual, almost lazy arc and slapped it back into place.

Fist and jaw met. Burke's brain exploded inside his skull. The flickering lamp seemed to burst into a blaze of dazzling, kaleidoscopic stars.

Then, one by one, they faded. Blackness closed in . . .

CHAPTER III

THE FEELING, Burke decided, basically was one of frustration — a moiling, roiling, boiling tension that crept higher and higher as his own helplessness became the more apparent.

Well, what else could he expect, in a situation sprung from mano-

mania's loins? From the beginning, everything about this business had had the spell of madness on it. Success, when the cards were down, had always been too much to hope for..

Now, thinking of it, Burke could only sigh bleakly and shake his head.

Only that wasn't quite true, either. For his head wouldn't shake, and his sigh held neither sound nor breath.

How had it all come about, this nightmare? Where had it started, really?

With the Research Professor?

With The Girl?

With The Director?

But no. In his heart Burke knew that none of them held the answer.

Because the beginning lay farther back . . . so much, much farther . . .

. . . All the way back to the old, dormer-windowed house amid the elms, and his childhood, and the Bowl of Minos.

The bowl . . .

He could still remember the first time he saw it, lying in a litter-heaped trunk up in the attic.

Fascinated, he'd picked it up and run stubby fingers over the stylized Minoan octopus that stood out in bold relief upon its surface, till it seemed he could almost feel the twining tentacles'

pressure.

It brought a queer sense of excitement to him . . . a sort of paradox of feeling that made him thrill to the bowl's beauty even while he stared at the creature that served as its decoration with a strange, shuddery sensation close akin to horror.

Then his mother saw what he was doing, and took the pottery vessel from him, explaining the while about the footloose, adventuring uncle who'd brought it here all the way from Crete.

A lump formed in Burke's throat as he recalled her patience . . . how when she'd found him returning again and again to the attic and the trunk, she'd brought the bowl down and given it a place on the livingroom table, where he could examine it all at will.

Someone even told him about Minos and Theseus and Pasiphæe and Ariadne and the Minotaur, and all the rest of the legendry that went with Bronze Age Crete.

Yet the legends were never quite enough. They raised too many questions; left too much unsaid.

The fragments of fact he picked up proved even less satisfactory.

How had a civilization rich and powerful and advanced as that of the Minoans ever risen on a sea-isolated island such as Crete?

Where had the Minoans learned their skills, their arts?

Above all, why had their culture vanished? What brought about Great Knossos' fall?

Questions without answers, all of them. Mysteries like the Cretan's strange, undeciphered writing, and the final fate of lovely Princess Ariadne, Minos' daughter, and how Theseus, bare-handed, could have slain the mighty Minotaur.

It was all enough to drive a seven-eight-nine-ten-year-old boy to distraction!

Then a careless visitor's elbow knocked the bowl to the floor. It shattered into shards.

At ten, a boy's too old to cry — before company, at least. So he'd clenched his fists behind his back, and blinked back the tears, and held his mouth to a stiff white line till he could be alone, face pillow-muffled, behind the closed door of his room.

And from that moment he'd known that sometime, somehow, he himself would find his way to Crete.

School became a place where he greedily snatched up crumbs of mythology and history between dreary hours spent battling his way through all the other subjects his teachers demanded that he learn.

High school brought a broader view. He began to see the inter-relatedness of learning. Literature,

chemistry, physics, Latin — of a sudden he found he loved them all.

Yet always, always, there ahead lay Knossos, beckoning.

How old had he been when, avidly, he plowed his way through Sir Arthur Evans' "Palace of Minos", groping his way by context past all the unfamiliar words? Thirteen? Fourteen?

By high school commencement time, he no longer cared that his parents couldn't understand his passion for things Cretan.

College, then. Major in anthropology, minor in classics. Greek now, as well as Latin. Linguistics, too. Comparative cultures, technical photography, ethnological methods, archaeological methods, museum methods. Year after year, course after course.

And always, the same goal. Let others weigh and choose between Yucatan and Oceania, Murdering Beach and the Valley of the Kings. For him — ever; always — there was only Minos and Knossos, and Bronze Age Crete.

Dion Burke, B.A., now. Dion Burke, M.A.

THEN, THE LAST STEP; the final goal: the onward, upward march to Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D.

Or rather, not quite: not quite Ph.D.

And that was where The Director

came in.

Burke cursed the day he'd met him.

A kindly soul, The Director, by his own statement, in spite of his scowl and beetling brows and jutting, heavy-boned, prognathous jaw. So fascinated by all things Minoan. So happy such a brilliant student had selected this most benign of all universities as the one at which to work for his doctorate.

It was only a step from there to casual acquaintance with The Research Professor.

The Professor was the first universally acknowledged-as-authentic genius Burke had even known. Even the man's colleagues on the staff of the university's Science Institute agreed that he knew more about certain aspects of electronics than anyone alive.

The Professor, it developed, wanted Burke's collaboration on a project — a device he termed a "computational translator" which he felt might solve the riddle of the mysterious Minoan language, if only its hieroglyphics could somehow be reduced to sound.

That was when Burke brought out his own idea, his madman's dream for the ultimate archaeological tool.

An inverter, he called it; a time inverter, designed to carry researchers back bodily into the past.

The Professor scoffed openly

when Burke first told him about it.

The second time, he frowned and tugged at his pointed chin.

The third found him already at work.

The computational translator, and the time inverter. Two lunatic concepts, born of monomania and genius.

Two concepts that, it appeared increasingly, just might work.

Time out for Korea . . . Chinese communists in quilted coats . . . blood and iron and freezing death.

Well, at least it would pay for the rest of the doctorate, under the GI Bill.

If he lived through it.

The notice of the car crash reached him at Heartbreak Ridge.

No mother now, no father. Just an inheritance.

More courses, more digging, more Professor's letters, pulsing excitement and jubilation for all their veiled language.

Home again. Back to the university. The shock of seeing at first hand just how far The Professor had gone; how short a distance there remained to go.

And then, at last, The Girl, and the old line about passes and glasses turning out not always to be true after all.

More courses, more digging, more months slipping by. The discussions, increasingly acerbic, as it

developed that The Director was a stiff-necked, belligerent bigot who classed Sir Arthur Evans and God in that order when it came to authority on matters Minoan.

The Girl, encouraging, all intellect and well-bred adoration. The Professor, designing a new-type radiation detector to help search out the truth about Knossos' fall, just in case they never did get the time inverter to work properly.

The Director, adamant.

The inverter, failing again and again.

The faint, nagging disappointment of discovering that The Girl could discuss the courtship customs of Papua and Parthia and Patagonia in detail, yet still hold a man at arm's length here on the campus.

But still, there was his dissertation to sustain him, his long-planned trip to Crete to cling to. Even if it took every penny of his inheritance, even if The Girl wouldn't marry him and go along because he still lacked his degree, the journey couldn't help but prove worthwhile.

By air, to London. Then to Athens and the British School, to complete contacts.

Finally, down across the Aegean to Crete itself.

He had to shove his hands deep into his pockets to hide their trembling when first he stepped from

the car at Knossos. Even seeing the reconstructed palace with his own eyes shook him that much.

The British, polite and helpful as they tried to hide their amusement at the use of the detector. The Cretan workmen, exchanging glances that said openly that he was surely mad.

And then, the needle, going crazy — trying to bounce clear off the dial. The headphones, buzzing till his ears hurt.

Endless hours of aching to talk to someone, yet not daring. Long days when the right words for the dissertation just wouldn't come.

And the words had to be right, exactly. He couldn't content himself with anything less. The whole dissertation — every page, every sentence, must be logic-grounded, solidly-documented, overwhelming evidence to prove his hypothesized explanation of the fall of Knossos.

He finished it, finally . . . came home again . . . turned in the first draft . . .

Then came that day in The Director's office. That ugly day, the last Burke was to spend in his own time and place.

The argument; the tempers, rising.

The Director — face flushed, jaw outthrust: "You young whelp, how dare you contradict Sir Arthur Evans? Would you set yourself up on a level with Hogarth? Pendle-

bury? Wace?" And then, the final knife-thrust: "Very well; have it your way. But so far as I'm concerned, I'll not accept this dissertation, now or ever. And so long as I'm here, you'll receive no doctorate, let alone a recommendation of any sort!"

Exit The Director. Forever.

Then, The Girl: "But Dion! Why did you have to be so stubborn? You could at least have kept your opinions to yourself till later. Now — well, how much of a field is there for an archaeologist with only an M. A. degree? You might as well forget Crete right now. And for my part, I must admit the idea of being the wife of an instructor in some second-rate college, at four thousand a year hardly appeals to me."

Exit The Girl. Forever.

The Research Professor, finally: "Damn it, Burke, I just don't dare to back you on it! Old Ape-Jaw's got the president's ear. If I even led it be known I designed that detector, I'll be operating this laboratory on a negative budget next biennium."

Exit The Professor. Forever.

In spirit, at least.

In body, though, he still might have his uses.

BURKE HELD his voice carefully level. "In other words, then, you won't even let me use

your name as supporting authority for my statement that the ruins at Knossos still show radiation traces?"

The Professor: "I'm sorry, Dion."

"But the time inverter—"

"Are you completely insane, boy? I built that thing with university funds. If anyone should find out about it, and that I didn't have proper authorization for it—well, all I've got to say is that I'm going to junk it first thing in the morning, before The Director has a chance to snoop around."

What happens to a man when he plunges into that deep a pit? How many blows can he take before he cracks?

Burke didn't even recognize that it was raining when he stepped out into the street.

Dully, he tramped through the gathering dusk. Block after block, mile after mile, hardly aware that his clothes clung to his body, soaked, or that water sloshed in and out of his shoes with every step.

Slowly, then, his thoughts began to sort themselves into some sort of order. A little at a time, conclusions took form and gave strength.

When it came right down to it, he didn't give a hang whether he ever achieved a Ph. D. degree or not.

So to hell with The Director!

As for security, a job, he'd lived through Heartbreak Ridge; and after that, any more economic peril came out as strictly anticlimax.

Losing The Girl—well, he had no choice but to admit it bruised his ego. Yet, on the other hand, it relieved him of all the gnawing inner doubts, the secret hesitations at her coolness.

The Professor? Another disappointment. But the mere fact that an idol's feet turned out to be of clay hardly rated as a unique discovery.

At any rate, he'd survive it.

So, what did that leave of his losses?

He cringed.

That was the way with dreams. They were so hard to give up.

And he'd worked towards this one for so long.

Now, there was nothing left to do but face the facts: he'd never have a chance at Crete; never really know for sure why Knossos fell.

Unless—

Burke stopped short.

What had The Professor said? That he'd destroy the time inverter first thing tomorrow morning?

Which still left tonight, didn't it?

It was a thought to appall any man in his right mind. For while The Professor admitted to small progress with the machine, he also

said frankly that he was completely stymied in the most vital area: while he had succeeded in transporting objects from present to past on an experimental basis, he couldn't move them even an instant into the future.

Carrying this a step further, anything sent into the past stayed there. It couldn't be returned to the present.

And that meant that if anyone named Dion Burke should prove so mad as to send himself back to Bronze Age Crete, there he'd stay, with no chance ever of return to Twentieth Century United States.

It was a thought to numb a man.

Yet, was it really so insane?

After all, what was more important to him than that he learn the truth about the fall of ancient Knossos? What else could satisfy him, after all these years?

Even if he died, it wouldn't matter too much. His parents were already gone, his friends mostly on the casual side.

For the first time, now, it dawned on Burke that rain was splattering in his face. It felt good. His clothes and shoes—he didn't even care that they were ruined.

Pivoting, he started the long tramp back to his apartment.

There, for comfort, he took a hot shower; then put on a clean, dry outfit.

It seemed like a good idea, also, to check his watch, fill his cigarette lighter, and stow the old five-shot Smith & Wesson thirty-eight he'd inherited from his father in the waistband of his trousers.

By the time he'd completed all such arrangements, the rain had stopped. Here and there, stars shone amid the thin clouds overhead.

H E A D UP, shoulders back, Burke strolled along the wet, glistening walk towards the campus. He felt somehow detached, apart from the world about him, and it was a good feeling, even though he also enjoyed the smell of the rain-soaked earth, and the way leaves had piled up in little dams along the gutter, and the hissing, whispering sound of tires on wet pavement every time a car went by. Once he even caught himself smiling a little, a small, quiet, secret smile, over the way The Director and The Girl and The Professor each in turn had looked as they took their stands and walked out of his life.

The main door of the Science Institute was still unlocked, so Burke went on in, pausing only to nod pleasantly to a campus policeman who happened to pass by at the moment.

The laboratory had a glass-paned door. Without hesitation, Burke rapped a hole in it with the butt of

his revolver, reached in long enough to turn back the bolt, then stepped inside and locked the door again behind him.

Now he turned to the inner room where The Professor dealt with his most private matters.

The first thing he noted upon entering was a cluttered desk, on one corner of which lay a flat box perhaps five by eight by two inches in size.

That pleased him, for by its grilled front he recognized the thing as the incredible, transistor-packed device The Professor described as a "computational translator." Experiments with assorted foreign students and American Indians of various tribes indicated that it would enable a man to conduct a successful two-way conversation in any language.

Strapping the box in place flat against his belly, Burke moved on past the desk.

Beyond it, around a corner, loomed the time inverter.

It was a cumbersome-looking thing, a cramped platform suspended amid grids of wire. Each grid, in turn, fitted within a larger framework appropriately equipped with calibrated spindles, so that the grids' relative position to each other and to the inner platform could be adjusted at will.

To one side, a neat control-board occupied a wall-space. A

larger area was given over to a screen somewhat like that of a television set.

Warily, Burke picked his way over to the screen. Now that he was here, his stomach showed a strong tendency to quiver. Despite all the long nights he'd spent in this room with The Professor, he found himself doubting his own ability to operate the inverter. As for the theory of the thing, that was completely beyond him.

But it was no time for doubt. Switching on the power, Burke carefully set about adjusting the control dials.

Latitude and longitude came first, down to minutes and then seconds. A moment's tuning, and Crete and then the Great Palace of Knossos lay before him on the scanner screen.

Falling back a step, Burke rubbed the nape of his neck where it ached from strain.

Time adjustment, now. A new set of dials.

The screen changed before his eyes. The work of excavation and reconstruction vanished. Off to one side, olive groves appeared. Then a building with unmistakably Byzantine architecture flashed on.

Again Burke twisted the dial. Again.

Now whole towns came and went. One moment, the screen showed neat huts and cultivated fields; the

next, ruins or no buildings at all.

But never a trace of people. People moved too quickly for even the finest settings of the time-spindles to show them.

Farther back. . . farther. . . farther. . .

And now there was only a great, dark ring on the hillside to mark the palace. Wall-blocks and pillars lay strewn like scorched blocks in all directions. It was as if lightning had blasted the very earth. The few huts to be seen stood far off, as if the site of Knossos were a place accursed, to be avoided under pain of death.

A chill touched Burke; and though he'd seen this sight a dozen times before, his fingers trembled.

Back farther. . . farther. . .

As swiftly as it had darkened, the screen came bright. The palace rose again, white gypsum walls and columns aglisten in the sunlight.

Skillfully, Burke adjusted the detail dial, working forward again to the moment when the palace had crumbled.

THE DISASTER came at night; that was plain to see. And so fast that the screen could not record the instant when it happened. One second, the buildings were there, solid as only rock could make them.

The next, there were only dark, blighted ruins.

Of course, the destruction could conceivably have taken hours, yet still show as instantaneous on the scanner.

But if a man were to go back to a time, say, twelve hours before the cataclysm. . .

He'd need to choose the right place, too . . . somewhere out of the line of palace traffic—that apartment off the Queen's Megaron, for instance.

Not too steadily, Burke set the dials; then straightened.

The realization of his own folly flooded through him in the same instant.

How could anyone be so mad as to sacrifice his life on the altar of sheer intellectual curiosity? What did it matter if he never knew why Knossos fell? To go through with this because he'd been intrigued by an octopus-decorated Minoan bowl as a child of seven—it was absurd. His place was here—in his own time, his own land. To think otherwise could only be evidence of gross imbalance.

He started to reach for the main switch; to turn off the inverter.

Simultaneously, a hand rattled the knob of the laboratory's outer door.

Burke froze.

Now a key clicked in the lock. A voice—the voice of the campus policeman—called, "All right, you! Come on out! We know you're

there!"

And then, not quite so plainly, the voice of The Professor: "Be careful, officer. He's been acting queerly—thinks I've some kind of strange machine in there. What he needs is a psychiatrist. But till we can get him to one, he may be dangerous."

The Professor, coppering his bets. . . taking no chances on trouble over having misused university funds to finance a private project.

Not even if it involved proclaiming a friend insane.

The final straw, piled on the camel's back.

And only one way out.

Savagely, Burke whipped the Smith & Wesson from his belt; then, tight-lipped, flicked a quick glance along the dials.

The inverter was as ready as it ever would be.

Breathing hard, Burke slid between the wire grids; stepped up onto the cramped central platform.

From the outer room: "Come out, now, Burke! You'll have a chance to prove you're sane—just a few tests, a month or two of observation—"

Burke gripped the activating switch, the lever that would throw full power into the grids.

Again, then, he hesitated.

The campus policeman's head appeared around the corner, peer-

ing. To one side, The Professor cried out. "The inverter—! Stop him!"

It was like a wire snapping in Burke's brain. He fired a single shot, high, and simultaneously threw the activating switch in one swift, coordinated flow of motion.

The grid-wires glowed. A tingle of energy pulsed through Burke's body.

The laboratory disappeared. . .

CHAPTER IV

BURKE HEARD the voices first—strange voices, speaking in a strange language.

The room came clear a moment later, cool and shadowy. Burke recognized it by its shape, and by the distinctive relief in painted stucco on one wall.

So his calculations had been correct. He'd landed in the apartment off the Queen's Megaron.

Cat-like, he moved towards the room's doorway, the voices.

The speakers were man and woman, apparently. And when Burke flicked the switch of the computational translator strapped tight to his belly, he found he could understand them almost as well as if they'd been talking English.

"...and you're a pretty thing, you know," the man was saying. "As a matter of fact. . ."

His voice trailed off, the last words lost in a rising feminine giggle. "Master Theseus! You're here to see my mistress, not me—"

Warily, Burke peered through the grating of a sort of grilled divider that helped to separate room from room.

The chamber beyond was larger than the one in which he stood. Brighter, too—a typical Minoan light-well spilled noonday sun clear along one side. The furnishings and the octopus frescoes on the wall showed an opulence that spoke of nothing less than royalty.

As for the man and the woman, they were alone in the room, and playing a game as old as time. That is, the man was trying to catch the woman—girl, really—while she strove to stay out of his reach.

Burke decided he could have taken her efforts more seriously if she hadn't kept giggling—not to mention slowing, whenever the man gave any sign of pausing in his pursuit.

Then, abruptly, the man leaped across a low table, cutting her off.

The girl promptly tripped, and fell into his arms.

The embrace that followed was a trifle too prolonged for Burke's tastes. When it ended, the girl sighed, starry-eyed, and ran long, supple fingers through her companion's short black hair. "How can a warrior such as you, a hero,

even look at a serving-wench like me, Master Theseus?" she murmured.

The man straightened and swelled out his chest; and now Burke saw that he was not only a good six feet tall and powerfully built, but handsome in a somewhat coarse, heavy-featured way.

"I'll deny no wench my favors just because she's of a lower station," he proclaimed pompously. "I've no doubt you'll keep a man as warm as this Princess Ariadne who's your mistress."

The girl giggled. "You mustn't say such things, Master Theseus! Ariadne's the loveliest woman in all Knossos."

"What—?" Theseus' broad brow furrowed, and he stood with mouth half open, looking more than a little stupid. "Are you trying to confuse me, wench? If this Ariadne's such a beauty, why must she send secretly for prisoners from her father's dungeon in order to find lovers?"

An uneasy shadow seemed to fall across the maid's pretty face. She moved restlessly. "It—it's the curse of Pasiphae, Master Theseus."

"The curse of Pasiphae—?" Theseus looked blank. "What's that, wench? Tell me of it."

"Of the curse?" The girl's smile grew suddenly stiff, and her hands moved in a small, nervous gesture.

Then, quickly, she came close

to her barrel-chested companion and slipped her arms about him. "No wonder you're the pride of Athens, Master Theseus! Close to you this way, I feel your strength. It brings a woman all sorts of thoughts—"

Belligerently, Theseus scowled and pushed her back. "None of that, wench! This curse—tell me about it!"

The girl drew a deep, unhappy breath, "If you must, then—" And, after a moment's pause: "You know, of course, that Pasiphae is King Minos' wife; Ariadne's mother?"

"Yes."

"And also that she lusted after the sacred bull of Zeus—"

"—and so gave birth to the monster in the Labyrinth, the Minotaur? Of course. Who hasn't heard it?"

The maid looked round almost fearfully. "Do you not see, then, Master Theseus? There's the curse! Ariadne's daughter of a woman who's defied all the laws of gods and men. Who knows what evil may befall the child? So, no youth dares even look at Ariadne, no matter how great her beauty."

Theseus' jaw sagged for a moment. Then he bristled. "It's not because of my fame, then, my prowess as a lover, that she sent you to bring me here in secret?"

The maid bowed her head. But

from his vantage-point, Burke could see her hidden smile—quick, minx-like. "She seeks only to escape her destiny, Master Theseus. In you, hero that you are, she sees one who might slay the Minotaur and take her away from Crete and the scorn and loneliness that so long have been her lot here."

"So!" grunted Theseus. "She'd use me, would she! Me, hero of Athens!"

HIS SCOWL grew even blacker. Then, abruptly, it faded. Sweeping the girl up bodily in his arms, he bore her to the nearest couch. "Enough of this empty talk, wench! We've wasted too much time already on your precious mistress!"

The couch groaned with their joint weight. Throwing the maid back, tilting her face up, Theseus strove to kiss her.

But now the girl drew away, struggling in obvious earnest. "No, Master Theseus, no! We dare not! Ariadne may come at any moment —"

"Let her come!" Athenian pinned maid with hands and body. "Let her see for herself who I prefer—"

Across the room, a door opened. A slim young girl, proud-faced and beautiful and poised, stood framed within the entry.

On the couch, the maid gave a

little shriek. "Princess Ariadne!" Frantically, she tried to writhe free of Theseus.

He clutched at her as she spun erect. Cloth ripped as her whole skirt tore away, leaving her standing well-nigh naked.

The maid's face flamed. Whirling, she darted for the grill-masked doorway where Burke stood hiding.

It took him off balance; it was that unexpected. Before he could even get clear, jump back, she dodged behind the grating; crashed into him full-tilt.

Burke reeled back against the door-frame.

The maid screamed.

Like an echo, Theseus tore away the screening grillwork.

After that, for Burke, there was no choice. Instinctively, he knew that no matter what the cost, he must gain command of the situation.

Snatching the Smith & Wesson from his waistband, he leveled it at Theseus. "Stand back, you!"

Apparently the computational translator put words and tone into language the bull-necked Athenian could understand. He stopped short.

Catching the maid by the shoulder, Burke shoved her, stumbling, over to join her playmate.

Next, Ariadne, still standing frozen beside the far door:

"You, princess!" Burke clipped tightly. "Over here, on the double!"

The slim girl didn't move a muscle.

Burke snapped, "Come here, I said! Now! Do you hear me?"

Coldly, the great dark eyes took in Burke and his so-different garments. Then, in a voice edged with scorn, the princess asked, "And who are you, to command the daughter of Minos in her own chambers?"

Sweat slicked Burke's palms, his forehead. "That doesn't matter. It's enough that I hold the power of the thunderbolt in my hand here." He gestured with the Smith & Wesson.

"Indeed?" Now, coolly, Ariadne strolled in his direction. "Perhaps, then, you're a god; is that it?"

Burke gaped. "Perhaps."

"Or more likely, you're just a thief from some far country." The girl stood very erect before Burke, oval face even lovelier for her anger. "What brought you to my chambers, dog? Or must I have you flayed alive to get an answer?"

The trouble with taking command of a situation, Burke decided, was that you had to be willing to go all out. And he wasn't.

At least, not with this slim young beauty.

Desperately, he tried a final gambit. "You, Theseus! Seize her!"

But now the Athenian's eyes had narrowed. His head came forward,

just a fraction. It had the effect of making his body loom even larger than before. He looked belligerent and dangerous.

Burke tried again. "Theseus—" "No."

Without volition, Burke found his finger tightening on the Smith & Wesson's trigger.

Beside Theseus, the maid whimpered. "Master Theseus—the thunderbolts—"

The Athenian snorted. "He's no god; he's a man. But if he reaches Minos with a tale of having found me in the Princess Ariadne's quarters, I'll be a long time dying." He licked thick lips. "No. Better that *he* should die. Here. Now."

He lunged at Burke.

Leaping aside, Burke thrust a foot between his charging adversary's legs.

The Athenian lurched wildly, clawing at the air.

Gun high for a quick blow, Burke leaped in close behind him.

Only then, incredibly, the other was whirling on one foot, with all the grace and skill of a ballet dancer.

Simultaneously, the other foot whipped up, kicking for Burke's groin.

With a desperate effort, Burke caught the blow on his forearms.

But now it was he who'd been fainted off balance. Before he could recover, a left-handed blow sent

him tottering backwards.

Then he hit a couch. His knees hinged. He sprawled belly-up exposed and helpless.

LIKE LIGHTNING, Theseus seized a great stone jar, a pithoi. Muscles bulging, with unbelievable strength he swung it high above his head, poised to dash down on Burke.

Burke jerked his revolver up and fired in one spasmodic movement, straight at the pithoi.

Gun-thunder echoed through the chamber. The great jar shattered, cascading slack-jawed Theseus with shards and oil.

Burke rolled from the couch and stumbled to a new defense-point against the nearest wall.

But one shot had been enough for the Hero of Athens. He still stood blank-eyed, looking more stupid than ever as he stared in a sort of numb fascination at the shattered stoneware about his feet.

As for the maid, she'd fainted. And the expression lovely Ariadne now wore was beyond Burke's power to read.

But already, feet were pounding in the corridor outside. Guards poured into the room, half-a-dozen of them—great, strapping blacks with spears and swords and shields.

Six guards. . . and only three shots left in the revolver.

Now the Cretan who seemed to

be in command of the Negroes looked about uncertainly. "What happened, princess?" he asked. "Who are these men, these strangers?"

For a moment, Burke thought, a smile almost flickered at the corners of Ariadne's mouth.

Then, coolly, she said, "They're strangers to me, too, warrior. I only know that when I came in, this one"—a gesture to Burke — "was tearing the clothes from my maid. Then, he swore he'd possess me, also, and would have, had it not been that this other,"—the gesture was to Theseus this time—"fought to save me."

The Cretan's nostrils flared. He spat an order to the guards: "This dog is yours. Slay him!"

Burke's stomach churned. It was all he could do to breathe.

Was this the way his dream must end—here, now, before he'd even learned the secret he'd come after?

Only then, as the blacks started forward, Ariadne spoke again: "No, guards! Don't kill him!" And slowly, calculatingly, dark eyes strangely brooding: "For this man says he's a god, and for such a blasphemer a quick death is too good.

"So, let him live—to face my father, Minos!"

CHAPTER V

THE PLACE WAS CALLED the Shrine of Oracles, Burke

gathered. It featured distinctively Minoan pillars—of cypress, and so tapered as to be smaller at the base than at the top.

Also, it stank with a peculiar, acrid odor.

But beyond that, to Burke, it seemed disappointingly-ordinary. . . hardly colorful enough to rate the trial of a man accused of playing god.

That is, so it appeared until his captors dragged him into a central room. . . and there, black-browed and haughty, sat bearded Minos on his throne.

A chill ran through Burke. Never had he seen such malevolence staring out of human eyes.

For his own part, it would be the supreme test of his skill and daring if he even left this room alive. With all his heart, he wished he had the Smith & Wesson back.

Lacking it, he'd have to rely upon his wits and play the scene by ear.

And that brought up another nagging question: why had Ariadne insisted on possessing herself of the weapon? And why did she take such pains to stay well separated from him, with others of his captors always in between?

Studying her now, it once again came home to Burke that she was indeed a strange, a tragic figure, for all her loveliness. For even here, in the presence of the mighty sea-king who was her father, her

isolation showed up all too clearly. The guards, the priests, the nobles—as one, they walked wide around her, as if some mark of shame and menace were blazoned on her forehead.

Perhaps—

But now Minos leaned forward upon his carved gypsum throne. "Well, blasphemer? How do you choose to die?"

The monarch's voice echoed the black hatred of all mankind that gleamed with such intensity in his eyes.

Burke forced himself to boldness. "Who says I blaspheme?" he demanded.

"Do you deny it, then, dog?" King Minos came up from his throne in blazing fury. "Do you dare to say that the Princess Ariadne, my own daughter, lies?"

"When she says I claim to be a god? No." Burke laughed harshly. And then, with sudden inspiration: "It's only the blasphemy I deny; not the godhood."

"Not the godhood—?" Now Minos' eyes distended. A note of uncertainty crept into his voice. "You mean, you stand before me claiming kinship to the mighty ones, the lords of earth and sea and sky who rule men's destinies?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"Then name yourself, mocker! Who is it you-claim to be?"

With a strange sort of detach-

ment, Burke found himself mentally flicking through the pantheon for some name that would fit well with his own.

"Well, blasphemer?"

Burke twisted his mouth into a thin, wry smile. "Would you disown mighty Dionysus?" he queried coolly. "Would you drive from your midst the giver of grapes and wine and joy?"

"Dionysus—!" In awed whispers, the name ran round the crowded room.

For the fraction of a second, Minos' gaze flickered.

Only then, a new storm of beligerence seemed to shake him. He strode forward, shaking his fist. "We'll see, dog! We'll see! The oracle shall decide!"

The whole throne-room quivered with sudden hushed fear.

"Make way!" roared Minos. "Make way to the shrine, that the oracle himself may judge this mocker!"

Then, to Burke: "— And if he declares you false, you dog, you'll wish I'd thrown you to the Minotaur before you die!"

He pivoted; stalked down an aisle formed by the onlookers.

Roughly, Burke's guards shoved him along behind. A stone-walled well loomed, with broad steps leading down.

—The lustral area! The sacred place of purification that Sir

Arthur Evans first had assumed to be a bath!

Only now, it was turning out in reality to be for revelation, not purification; a holy of holies where Man could receive the pronouncements of the gods.

The guards let go of Burke when he reached the steps. Apparently they had no intention of following him down into the pit itself.

Of a sudden he felt strangely nervous. His knees showed a tendency to shake.

But he couldn't let that happen, and he knew it. Not if he wanted ever to leave this weird place alive. So he straightened his shoulders and clenched his teeth and strode boldly after King Minos.

WITH EVERY STEP, the biting, acrid smell grew stronger. Burke almost choked on it. He found himself wondering if perhaps the oracle spoke in trances induced by vapors; if maybe this pit were outlet for a pocket of some sort of natural gas.

Not even a whisper rose from the watchers in the throne-room. The only sound was the scrape of his own shoes upon the stone.

Then, at last, he and Minos reached the bottom of the stair. Dramatically, the sea-king threw wide his arms. "Mighty oracle of Zeus, it is your chosen one who calls!" he thundered. "Speak to me!

Tell me—tell all of us—if this creature here beside me is a god!"

Silence.

"Speak, oracle! Give us your answer! Is this truly Dionysus? Or is it but a man, a blasphemer we should slay?"

More silence.

Burke choked on a sudden impulse to laugh. To think of it—a twentieth century man, and a Bronze Age sea-king, together in this dank, smelly hole, calling on the gods for a revelation!

And what if the oracle's secret really turned out to be gas? Might it prove his own salvation—or at least give him a quick and easy death?

For instance, suppose he were to flick the wheel of his pocket lighter—would the all-pervasive smell explode or burn?

"Oracle, I am your chosen one, King Minos! I command you—"

Quietly, Burke palmed the lighter.

"Speak, oracle; speak!"

A sudden recklessness surged through Burke. He opened his mouth to laugh.

And stopped stone cold.

Because suddenly, out of nowhere, another mind was probing in his brain!

Instinctively, he strove to force out the invader.

The very effort gave him new insight. For now, as he fought, he

knew that the mind which he had joined in combat was not human, but alien. Its whole quality and mode of thought were of another order, another realm.

Feeling that mind, fighting it, Burke all at once understood the malevolence he'd seen in Minos' eyes.

In the sea-king, he faced a man possessed.

Now, the alien thing sought to possess him, too.

Savagely, Burke met its probings. Sweating, straining, he fought it, hate for hate, and turned it back, and drove it from his brain.

Then, as quickly as it had come, the pressure was gone.

But in the same instant, Minos cried out, "This is no god! This is but a man!"

And from the crowd above, a thunderous echo: "Yes, yes! He's but a man!"

The bearded king turned on Burke. His sword-point scraped the grillwork of the translator case still strapped flat against Burke's belly beneath the clothes. "Up, dog! Up from this holy shrine and meet your doom!"

Bleak, dry-lipped, Burke started up the stair.

At the top, directly ahead of him and in the front row of those waiting, stood Ariadne.

As he climbed, now, her eyes caught his and, burning, held them

for a moment. Then her hands moved in a quick, restricted gesture that momentarily pulled her stylized apron to one side.

The Smith & Wesson hung beneath it.

Burke drew a shallow, unsteady breath.

Six steps more and he'd be at floor level. That left no time to question motives.

Casually, he flipped back his lighter's lid.

Three steps more, now.

Another quick, shallow breath. Then, spinning the lighter's wheel with his right thumb, he knocked Minos' sword from his back with his left forearm and thrust flame straight at the sea-king's eyes.

The monarch gave a choked, incoherent yell and jerked back. A shove, and he was crashing down the stair.

Whirling, Burke charged like a battering-ram straight into the crowd at the head of the steps.

Screams, scrambling, panic. Burke dived across two fallen priests, at Ariadne.

The next instant he had the revolver, and his free arm was locked about her waist. When a thick-shouldered noble started towards him, swinging a great double-axe, he fired by sheer reflex.

The axeman stopped short, a shocked expression on his face and a hole in his chest. When he fell,

the whole throne-room sounded with the hiss of breaths sharply indrawn.

Burke rapped, "I'm leaving. Your princess goes with me. Try to stop me and she dies!"

Out the door, then. Down a corridor.

Ariadne whispered, "Quick, my lord Dionysus! Up this stair, here!"

More halls, more stairways. Big rooms and little.

Finally, a tiny, windowless cubicle opening off a light-well.

BURKE TURNED to Ariadne. "All right, princess. We'll hide here till dark, then get you out of Knossos."

A look of strain came to the girl's face. "My lord, it—it cannot be."

"It can't?"

"No, my lord. We—I—I dare not leave the palace. My father's men—they'd run me down within a finger's-breadth of time."

"Oh?" Burke studied her. "Tell me, princess, what makes you so sure?"

"It—it is the Minotaur, my brother." Ariadne's face took on a heightened color. "You see, Lord Dionysus, at my father's will the monster holds me here within the palace. No matter how I try to hide or run away, always he tracks me down."

Burke stood very still. "He— know he's only—half—my brother." tracks you down—?"

"Yes, my lord." The girl raised a restless hand to smooth her jet-black hair. "His mind—it follows mine, you see. So when I would flee, he sends pursuers to drag me back." And then: "Lord Dion, I confess: at first I sought to save you so that you, a god, would slay the Minotaur and carry me away."

"I see."

"But now—I'm not so sure that you're a god."

"So?"

"So. . .so. . ." The girl's voice broke. She hid her face. "My lord, I know only that I bear a curse. So, you must go quickly, and forget me. Because if you should die on my account, I—I—"

Her words faded into sobs:

A sudden tenderness rose in Burke. He held the shaking girl close.

And then, all at once, the things he felt were beyond tenderness.

It gave his problem a new dimension; added another element to complicate his road.

"Could it be that the Minotaur and the oracle really are one?" he asked abruptly.

Ariadne lifted a tear-stained face. "How did you guess, my lord?"

"This mind-track business—do you have any idea how it works?"

The girl's cheeks flamed. "Don't shame me, Lord Dionysus! You

"And on account of that wild story about the sacred bull and your mother, Pasiphae, you think he's got powers beyond the human?" Burke snorted. "Believe me, princess, it isn't true. Either that creature's not half a bull, or else he's not half your brother. A thing called science says it can't be." He grinned suddenly. "My own bet's that he's neither bull nor human. And maybe the best way to check on that is to ask your mother a few questions."

"Then I'll come with you!" This eagerly, from Ariadne.

Burke shook his head. "No. We'll not risk your pretty neck on the kind of thing I need to do."

"To walk with a god can bring no risk, my lord."

"That's just the trouble, princess," Burke acknowledged ruefully. "You see, you were right. I'm a man, not a god."

"Then all the more reason for me to stay with you."

"There's no use arguing. It's settled."

A small foot, stamping. "Lord Dion, I shall go!"

"Sorry, princess." Burke smiled bleakly. "I'll see you at your quarters later. Meanwhile. . ."

He struck quick and hard, straight to her jaw, then gently stretched her limp form on the floor. . .

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS A JIGSAW puzzle with too many pieces, Burke decided. No matter how he tried to analyze it, he always came out with a vital fragment or two left over.

Take the Minotaur. Did such a creature actually exist? Or was the thing simply a figment of imagination?

Assuming its existence, what about the strange mental powers with which it had tried to probe his brain?

Alien powers.

Yet if it were alien, what was King Minos' relation to it? Why would a human join hands with anything that radiated such malevolence and hate?

Or, for that matter, what was the relation between the sea-king and his own daughter, Ariadne? Freudians would have a field day with that business of the mind-thing's holding her within the palace at her father's behest.

Finally, staying on the personal level, where did Pasiphae fit in? What lay behind the legend of her having bribed Daedalus the Smith to build her a wooden cow so that she could be joined with the sacred bull? Could she actually have given birth to the Minotaur, or was that tale merely symbolic?

Then, looking at the larger elements, the questions that had

brought him here to start with, what was the origin of the radiation traces on the site of Knossos? And how had the city so mysteriously fallen in a single night?

Questions without answers, so far. All of them.

Further — Burke checked his watch—it was past four now, and that meant he had only eight hours more before the palace met its doom.

Yet he couldn't take Ariadne out till he'd somehow immobilized the Minotaur.

Cursing under his breath, he wondered what had become of Pasiphae; why she wasn't where she belonged, in the Queen's Megaron.

Now two maids appeared, an older woman between them. Hastily, Burke flattened himself on the high ledge where he was hiding and waited to see what would happen.

Leading the woman to one of the low benches along the wall, the maids spread a tapestry-like cloth for their charge to sit upon, then withdrew. The door closed behind them.

Burke frowned. There was a strangeness about the whole procedure that puzzled him. Not a word had been spoken. And, once seated, the woman hadn't moved.

Warily, he moved a fraction closer to the edge of his ledge, so that he

could see the woman better.

She was richly dressed, with skirts that fell in bright folds ornamented with lotus-blossom designs. Her bodice was the most ornate that Burke had seen.

Yet it was her face, rather than her garments, that held the largest part of Burke's attention. That this was Pasiphae, he could have no doubt. The resemblance between her and Ariadne was that marked.

The points of difference puzzled him, though. He tried to analyze them.

And then, all at once, he knew.

For where Ariadne's face was alive and expressive and animated, this woman's features sagged passive and loose. Her greying hair had the neatness of the maids' attention, but none of the flair that bespoke personal interest. Her eyes stared out vacuous and blank upon the room.

Burke's frown deepened. Carefully, he checked every detail again and again.

And then, in the position of her hands, he found the key.

For the fingers of the left were turned up and twisted at an awkward angle. . . yet still they stayed there, minute after minute after minute.

Burke sucked in air. "Catatonic!" he exclaimed aloud.

The woman gave no indication that she'd heard him.

Dropping from the ledge, he came close to her; passed his hand before her eyes.

Still she gave no sign of awareness.

Burke shivered. "Pasiphae. . ." he whispered. "Pasiphae!"

No answer.

Burke tried again: "Pasiphae, tell me about your son, the Minotaur."

Nothing.

"About Minos, Pasiphae. About Ariadne."

Blank, staring eyes.

Burke paused, considered. Then, leaning close, he whispered, "The thing, Pasiphae; the mind-thing. The creature that comes into your brain—"

Without warning, Pasiphae screamed. Then, before Burke could stop her, she was on her feet and darting past him—fleeing like a woman possessed down a long corridor.

Burke raced after her.

Then, just when he thought that he would catch her, she came up short; whirled on him, eyes suddenly wild and wide. "You! Are you one of them?"

"One of them—?"

"No, you're not! You don't make my head hurt like they did! They always hurt. Always. . . always. . ."

SHE SAGGED BACK against the wall. Once again, her eyes

began to glaze.

Burke said, "Minos, your husband. . . is Minos one of them?"

Startlement. "Don't take him! Don't take my baby! I won't let them have him! I'll get him back! I will—"

The woman struck out at Burke, then ran.

Sickness in him, he followed.

Only this time, she turned sharply; plunged down a narrow flight of stairs.

Cursing, Burke half-fell down the steps.

It was dark at the bottom. He could see nothing of Pasiphae. But her footsteps still sounded so, groping, he tried to follow.

The next instant he stepped off into hip-deep water. Floundering, he fought for balance.

Something clutched at his legs.

Burke bellowed aloud from sheer shock. Desperately, he tried to scramble out of the pool.

The thing holding him let go. Shaking, Burke dragged himself onto the footwalk, flicked on his lighter, and stared down into the water.

An octopus with a head nearly double the size of his own met his gaze coldly.

Shivering, Burke closed the lighter and felt his way, an uneasy step at a time, along the edge of the tank.

Then at last he met a blank wall

. . . found another flight of stairs . . . groped his way down them.

Close at hand, Pasiphae screamed shrilly and ran on again.

Abruptly, then, light, as a distant door opened. Burke sprinted towards it.

Beyond, when he reached the entry, lay the strangest room he'd ever seen.

For this was no half-barbaric Bronze Age chamber. Instead, it shimmered with the cold fire of a blue-white metal the like of which Burke had never seen before. Light pulsed from it—all of it, till he felt as if he were walking in some sort of tremendous lamp.

And there ahead, at the far end of the room, was Pasiphae.

Again, Burke sprinted.

Laughing wildly, the woman stepped into a cubicle.

Like magic, she vanished.

For an instant Burke hesitated, then entered the box-like area himself.

This time, the room through which he'd come vanished.

Almost instantly, then, another chamber appeared—one so vast Burke couldn't be sure where it ended.

A thing like a flattened cone stood in the chamber's center, looming like a miniature mountain.

Or perhaps one not so miniature.

It, too, was of the shimmering, blue-white metal. Not a sign of an

opening marred its shining surface.

And yet, Burke realized numbly, there must be ports of some sort.

Because the thing was beyond all doubt a space-ship, a vessel designed for interplanetary—maybe even interstellar—travel.

It came to Burke in that moment, with grim humor, that he'd found the answer to his questions; most of them, at any rate.

The radiation; Knossos' downfall; the mind-thing that was the Minotaur, or vice versa—all such came clear now.

This was an alien colony, set down on Crete. Which meant that anything which might befall the native population would, in the eyes of the invaders, be seen as no great issue.

So, this was a good place to be away from; and the quicker, the better.

Bleakly, he looked around for Pasiphae.

She stood cowering a dozen yards away, eyes fixed blankly on the gigantic alien craft.

Slowly, carefully, Burke approached her. The best idea he could think of was to take her hand; he'd read somewhere that leading was the best procedure in dealing with any mental case.

Gently, he reached out.

But when his fingers touched hers, it was as if an electric shock had leaped between them. Scream-

ing as, before, Pasiphae ran from him.

From him, and straight towards the space-ship.

In frantic haste, Burke started to follow.

Only then, all at once, there was a blinding flash that centered on the woman. Tendrils of smoke curled up from a charred, crumbling husk.

SICK WITH HORROR, Burke stared for one brief moment. Then, at the double, he hurried back to the cubicle from which he'd stepped.

Now he noted that a duplicate stood beside it. Which, he assumed, meant that this was a two-way transportation system, leading from the ship to Knossos. How far apart the two were, he couldn't even guess at. Miles, probably. The very fact that transportation was called for would indicate that.

He stepped into the second cubicle; then, a moment later, out again in the room beneath the palace.

It bothered him a little that he still hadn't seen any of the aliens. He liked the idea of knowing what he was fighting.

But that couldn't be helped. The important thing now was to act quickly; to meet and defeat the Minotaur so that he could get Ariadne out of the palace before

it was destroyed.

He checked his watch: nearly eight already. It was incredible how fast time slipped away.

Back up the stairs and through the tank-room to the Queen's Megaron. Then out the light-well by which he'd entered, and through the gathering dark to the Shrine of Oracles.

Because that was where he'd have to start; he knew that from the things he'd heard as prisoner. The entrance to the Labyrinth, the way to the Minotaur, was through some passage in the shrine.

Only there was a guard on the first entrance he tried, and on the second also.

In ten minutes he knew the truth: a mouse couldn't creep into the shrine tonight without being run through by a Sudani spearman.

So, he had no choice but to try a different route, the route of legend.

First, he'd have to locate Ariadne, even though it demanded another hair-raising human fly act, clambering down a pitch-black light-well.

Then, through her, he'd reach Daedalus, demand a thread, plunge into the Labyrinth.

Only that wasn't right. The legend said Theseus did that.

Yet Theseus was drunk, dead drunk, back there in Ariadne's quarters.

Or was he?

It dawned on Burke, then, that nothing but delirium could account for such confusion. How else could he be flying and falling at once? What other explanation would take in such a strange, shifting mixture of past and present?

Then, suddenly, he became aware of the cold stone beneath his back. In a flash, he remembered how Theseus had trapped him. . . forced him into the sewer. . . dragged him to the Labyrinth's one secret entrance. . . struck him down. . .

CHAPTER VII

CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNED

C to Burke with dragging steps.

Perhaps that was because the place in which he now lay was so dark. It stayed that way even when his bruised jaw and aching head told him for certain that this was reality, not delusion. No matter how he strained his eyes, he could see absolutely nothing.

Not that it mattered. Because he knew where he was, beyond mistaking. His nose told him, picking up the acrid scent that had been so all-pervasive in the Shrine of Oracles.

Only here, it was worse. Here, it rose sharp and biting as the very smell of death.

And that meant he could be nowhere but in the Labyrinth it-

self!

The thought knotted Burke's stomach. Yet when he strove to move, his bonds held him, unyielding.

Theseus had done this job well, Burke decided. With no trouble at all, it could spell doom for him.

Which brought up another question: what time was it?

By the very fact that he remained alive, he assumed it still wasn't midnight; that Knossos hadn't been destroyed.

But even if he'd blacked out only for two or three minutes, the fatal moment couldn't be far off. . . not more than half an hour, at most.

It was the kind of thought to put a man upon his mettle. Floundering, Burke tried to break his bonds.

It was useless. The cords wouldn't give a fraction.

That meant he had to find some other way out.

Twisting, he made an effort to check his pockets' contents.

Small change, a comb, two keys, his lighter.

His lighter—!

Involuntarily, Burke breathed faster. Squirming, writhing, he strained to bring his bound hands to where one could reach into the proper pocket, instead of just feeling what was there through fabric.

Now tingling fingers told him the cords had cut off circulation. Let his hands get too numb, and

he wouldn't even be able to hold the lighter.

A final effort. One thumb slipped into the pocket. Burke hooked it into the opening and heaved.

A seam ripped, noisy in the stillness. The pocket's contents rattled on the stone floor.

Rolling over again, Burke groped till his trembling fingers found the lighter. Flicking back the lid, he spun the wheel.

Flame licked at the palm of his other hand. For a moment it was all he could do to keep from crying out, dropping the lighter.

But he gritted his teeth instead and, sweat streaming down his face, forced himself to lower the lighter carefully so that it stood upright on the floor.

Now, once again, speed became the issue. It went without saying that the lighter's fluid must be almost exhausted.

If it burned out too soon—!

Burke bit down harder. Heedless of the pain and sweat and knotting muscles, he forced himself to thrust his wrists down so the flame could play upon the cords.

In seconds, the stench of searing flesh and burned cloth blotted out the chamber's odor. Eyes squeezed tight shut as if to shut out the agony, cursing beneath his breath, Burke strained to keep his bonds taut and in the right position.

Then, when it seemed that he

could stand the pain no longer, a cord snapped like a clipped wire. Another followed.

The next instant, Burke's wrists were free.

Sobbing soundlessly, he batted out the lighter, to save what fuel remained.

After that, the job became routine—a matter of stripping loose ends of cord from his wrists; working his fingers till circulation was restored; untying his ankles.

The burns still hurt; and, he knew the pain would be even worse later on. What to do about it, though — that was something else again.

In any case, he needed light.

Rising, once more he flicked on the lighter.

Mostly, it revealed emptiness and shadow. But there was a lamp-stand over to one side, so Burke made his way to it and lighted the lamp.

Now, for the first time, he checked his watch.

Eleven thirty five. Less than half an hour till Knossos met its doom.

It raised a new problem: what was his own best course now? To stay here? To go seek out the Minotaur as first planned? Or to drop back through the open manhole he now spotted over in one corner, and put his trust in flight?

That last idea—it had much to commend it. For one thing, almost

any manhole where he might come up, save only this one, would put him in a position to keep a whole skin and escape the palace, even without the thread of Daedalus to guide him.

For another, any attempt on his part now to slay the Minotaur was doomed to failure in advance. Obviously. Theseus had made off with the Smith & Wesson. Without it, or equivalent, no one could hope to meet the monster and live.

LAMP IN HAND, Burke went over to the manhole and sat down on the edge, legs dangling, in preparation for the drop into the drainage tunnel below.

Only then, as he momentarily hesitated there, bracing himself, his mind turned to the one subject he most wished to avoid.

Ariadne.

It had to come, of course. He'd known it all along. You couldn't ignore a woman in a moment of crisis such as this one—not when she meant as much to you as Ariadne did to him.

So, what would happen to her, if he dropped down through this manhole into the sewer?

Answer: she'd die. In less than half an hour she'd die, without note, in the destruction of this strange, gleaming palace men called Knossos.

And nothing he, Dion Burke, or

anyone else, could do would save her, so long as the Minotaur lived.

Now the question became, did he care about escaping, living, if he had to do it alone, without his lovely Ariadne?

Burke forced himself to hesitate on that one. He didn't want to react to it hastily, or casually, or emotionally, or without due thought and consideration.

The only difficulty was, a man's feelings weren't something he could put on or take off at will, like a suit of clothes. They were part of him, incorporated into every cell of meat and blood and bone and tissue.

And there was the answer to his basic question: win or lose, live or die, he'd leave Knossos only with Ariadne at his side.

Beside, hadn't the legends said that Theseus slew the Minotaur with his bare fists? Maybe a proxy could do likewise!

Swinging his legs up out of the manhole, Burke scrambled to his feet, somewhat heavily. The burns on his wrists were hurting worse now, and he hardly felt in the best of shape to do battle with a monster.

But it seemed he had little choice. So, lamp in hand, he moved along the wall looking for an exit.

It wasn't till he'd worked his way through half a dozen pitch-black chambers that two things dawned

on him:

First, the solution to the problem of his scorched, seared wrists was oil; and such was available in the jars that flanked almost every lamp-stand.

Second, the quickest way to the Minotaur was to follow his nose. Once he'd located the source of the strange, acrid smell, odds were he'd also have found the monster.

Doused liberally with oil, Burke's wrists felt better. And it was no feat at all to choose his path by odor.

Yet time still seeped away. . . he had a bare fifteen minutes left now, if his watch and calculations proved right.

How big could this cursed maze be?

Too big, apparently.

Then, just when despair was about to overtake him, a thin line of light gleamed far ahead.

A sheen of cold sweat came to Burke's palms. He moved forward more warily, more silently, than ever.

The light, it developed, shone from the crack beneath a door.

Like a shadow, Burke crept close; laid his ear against the panel, listening.

No sound.

Ever so gently, he laid the fingers of his left hand against the portal; pressed slowly.

New light appeared, washing

through the crack along the jamb.

A moment of taut waiting. Then Burke put his eye to the opening and peered through, into a large, sumptuously-furnished room. The room of a noble, perhaps, or even a king.

The only thing strange about it that Burke could see was that what appeared to be a large tank occupied the center of the room. . . a tank of shimmering, blue-white metal, utterly unlike the bronze of the Minoans; precisely the same as the material of which the great ship in the cave was made.

The hair along the back of Burke's neck prickled. Moving first to one side and then the other, he checked as large a portion of the room beyond the door as possible.

No occupants, so far as he could see.

With a quick push, he sent the door all the way back, swinging wide, while he poised rigid in the shadows.

Still no reaction.

Silently, Burke crossed the threshold.

Here the acrid smell was almost overpowering; and though the room itself was unoccupied, a strange, pulsating aura of evil seemed to flow through it in great waves.

Burke tip-toed to the shining, blue-white tank; peered down into it.

It held clear liquid only. But the stink of the stuff made Burke choke and gasp. His eyes burned. He stumbled backward, fighting for breath.

In the same instant, cloth rustled behind him.

Burke whirled.

A TAPESTRY had been flung back, revealing a previously-hidden door. Framed in it, well over seven feet tall, stood a creature Burke couldn't believe even now, as he stared at it.

The thing was a man, at first glance—a giant of a man, mightily muscled. He wore nothing save the traditional Minoan loinband.

But it was the creature's head that held Burke; froze him.

For instead of a human head, to match a human body, this monster had the head of gigantic bull, with monstrous horns and great glaring eyes and nostrils that flared and quivered.

Burke's hand shook so his lamp almost slopped over. A slow step at a time, he tried to back away.

But now, with a great bull-roar, the monster's head came down. It lunged at him.

Burke hurled the lamp at it.

Incredibly fast, the thing dodged. The lamp struck the wall. Flame leaped along the tapestry.

But the Minotaur paid the fire no heed. Again it lunged at Burke,

spear in at him with one of the great bull horns.

Barely in time, Burke dived aside. Desperately, he scrambled past the central tank, searching vainly for some weapon. When he stumbled over a low stool, he snatched it up, glad for anything that he could use to strike a blow.

Another bellow. The monster launched a new charge.

Burke swung the stool.

But even as the blow descended, the Minotaur brought up huge hands to stop it. Catching the stool by the legs, the creature jerked it up, trying to wrestle it away from Burke.

For an instant, then, they struggled, toe to toe, fighting for possession of the stool.

But only for an instant, for Burke knew without question what the outcome would be; must be. No ordinary man could stand against this hideous freak of nature. It simply was too much to hope for.

Yet unless he won, what would happen to Ariadne?

Fiercely, he threw all his weight onto the stool, swinging by it, completely clear of the floor.

Then, savagely, he slashed a foot down, so that the edge of his shoe raked his opponent's shin from knee to ankle before it hit the instep with smashing force.

The Minotaur half doubled over.

A hoarse gust of pain burst from its throat.

Burke let go the stool. With all his might, he struck straight upward, between the monster's outstretched arms to the great bull-jaw.

New sounds of anguish—almost human, this time. The creature lurched forward flat-footed, off balance.

Burke leaped back. Catching the huge horns, he gave them a tremendous wrench, with all his weight behind it, the way he'd seen bulldoggers handle steers at rodeos.

Something cracked, so loud Burke could hear it even through the tumult. He wrenched again, harder.

A tearing sound, this time.

The next instant, Burke tumbled to the floor.

And that didn't make sense, because he still gripped the Minotaur's great horns.

Spasmodically, he threw himself to one side and over.

Across the room, the whole length of the tapestry was in flames now, blazing and crackling. Eddies of fire danced along the cypress beam above it, and the door-frame.

In front of it stood the Minotaur.

Only now, the Minotaur had no head.

At least, not the great bull's head. That was gone, torn away,

left to lie like a hideous mask on the floor midway between Burke and the creature.

Where the bull's head had been, atop the monster's mighty shoulders was now, instead, a human head . . . the tiny, distorted skull of a microcephalic imbecile.

And on top of that head—eyes glittering balefully; tentacles hugging it tight to its host's skull—squatted what appeared to be a jet-black octopus slightly less than the size of a bowling ball.

Yet it was no octopus sprung from Earth's own waters. Burke knew that the instant he saw it; knew it by the way the creature's eyes fixed on him; knew it in the chill that shook him as the thing's evil intelligence lanced forth to lock in mortal combat with him in his own brain.

And in a way, all that was good. At least, it relieved him of uncertainty; demonstrated once and for all that he'd been right when he refused to believe offspring could come from the mating of bull and woman.

No, that was only fable; a Bronze Age fantasy.

The fact, quite probably, was that Pasiphae had given birth to an imbecile who also happened by some strange quirk to be a physical giant.

What better host for an alien telepath, a creature not adapted

to Earth as a planet or to dry-land living?

Then, to conceal the truth, hide alien and microcephalic skull alike beneath a great bull's head mask, and build a labyrinthine domicile where only its victims would ever meet it face to face.

All of which was interesting as conjecture, but hardly of practical use to a man faced with an alien-guided, seven-foot giant as of this very moment.

Such thoughts—! In spite of his plight, Burke couldn't help but smile wryly. With a strong effort of will, he forced the alien's probing tentacles of thought out of his brain; rose slowly, warily, holding the octopod's glittering eyes with his own.

HE WAS ON HIS FEET now; and, once up, he became distinctly, unpleasantly aware of the room's heat. . . the billows of smoke, the roaring of the flames that leaped along the roof-beams.

It was time for him to leave. Definitely.

For the fraction of a second, he let his eyes flicker towards the door.

Like a flash, his giant foe lunged for him. Before he could duck or dodge, he was jammed back against the wall. Great hands shoved at his chest, pinning him.

Desperately, Burke tried to strike back.

His reach was too short. He couldn't land a blow.

Now a vacuous smirk wreathed the microcephalic's loose-lipped face. The tiny eyes shone with delight.

There was no change in the octopod's baleful glare.

Now the giant pushed harder.... harder. . .

Burke felt his ribs begin to give. He swung his arms wildly, clutching in a frenzy for something—anything—

His hand touched an oil-jar. He clawed it to him.

But the Minotaur merely shifted, blocking him so he couldn't strike a blow.

Death was very close now. Burke knew it. Another moment, and his ribs would snap and pierce his heart, his lungs.

A convulsive tremor shook him. Oil spilled from the jar.

Oil—!

With his last ounce of strength, he brought the jar up sharply, knowing even as he did it that his foe would block the blow.

But the oil would keep on going, maybe. . .

It hit the alien full in the face.

Burke could feel the thing lose control of its host. Even in his own brain, it was as if a crushing

weight had suddenly been lifted.

Simultaneously, the human giant's arms dropped.

Burke ducked and threw himself bodily at the other's knees..

The imbecile fell.

And now, alien abandoned host, racing across the floor on its tentacles towards the shimmering, blue-white tank.

Burke snatched up a second oil-jar; hurled its contents.

The oil slapped over the creature in a wave. Fire leaped from the flaming tapestry to meet it.

The next instant the alien itself was a threshing, blazing ball.

Then a ceiling timber crashed down on it in a shower of sparks.

The threshing stopped.

Burke ran for the nearest door. . .

CHAPTER VIII

SHE WASN'T THERE. Even when he ran back through her rooms, calling her name aloud, she wasn't there.

Numbly, Burke stumbled forth again, out onto the long ascending ramp that led to the central court.

Over on the far side, at the Shrine of Oracles, orange-yellow flames leaped high into the black night sky. Whipped by the buffeting south wind, they jumped to another building while Burke

watched; then on to still another. Silhouetted figures ran this way and that—gesturing, shouting.

Once again, Burke checked his watch.

Eleven fifty-five now. Only five brief minutes till the moment all Knossos was to be destroyed, according to the time inverter's scanner screen.

Still Burke hesitated, straining his eyes against the night as he strove for some glimpse of Ariadne. In taut concentration, he listened for the distant echo of her voice.

Without avail.

Then, while he yet lingered, a man called out to him hoarsely. He wheeled just as one of Minos' huge Sudani guards came hurrying in his direction.

It was a stimulus Burke couldn't ignore. Another moment and the man might recognize him. Whirling, he sprinted up the nearest stairway, then across the flat roof of the back of the building.

A quick drop to the ground again. A daredevil slide down the steep East Bastion. A stumbling, headlong run along the bank of the river called Kairatos to the cover of a clump of cypress trees.

But now that he had started running, it seemed the best idea not to stop. On he fled, and on, clambering over boulders, careen-

ing into ditches.

Then, at last, he found himself in a crown of brush atop a little knoll, a good half-mile or better from the palace. Panting, unable to go further, Burke flung himself down in the blackest of the shadows and lay there, staring back at the strange, stark majesty that was Knossos.

The flames of the fire he'd started in the Labyrinth still were spreading. Sparks swirled in the wind, carried high by blaze-stoked updrafts; then dispersed, floating farther and farther from the central core of heat, till at last they fell again, to ignite new buildings.

Tearing his attention from the distant holocaust, Burke peered at his watch once more.

Twelve ten.

So the zero hour had come and gone, with nothing happening save the continued spread of the fire.

Burke felt a little sick. Had all his efforts, his anguish, gone for nothing? Was he to live out his life in Bronze Age Crete to no purpose save to prove correct that part of Pendlebury's theory that said that Knossos, dying, had been swept by fire?

Burke cursed beneath his breath. He still couldn't, wouldn't, believe it. It left too many loopholes. After all, what about the business of the radiation traces he'd detected; the

blighted circle that showed on the scanner screen? Why, for so many hundred years, had Cretans shunned the site of their ancient glory?

Then, too, there were his own personal experiences of the past few hours to think of. Pasiphae's monstrous imbecile son; the octopodal alien telepath—what roles did they play?

Not to mention the great, shimmering, blue-white ship hidden deep within the earth.

Certainly Pendlebury's theory offered little save the detail of the fire to commend it. The invasion part, the idea that outsiders had swept down on the palace, with torch and sword—that simply wasn't true.

Not unless he, Dion Burke, might be said to constitute a whole task force in himself, just because by accident he'd set the Labyrinth ablaze.

As for his hopes, his dreams, the way he felt towards Ariadne—

A wave of sheer frustration came with the thought. Savagely, Burke hammered the dirt with a clenched fist. Then, breathing hard, he scrambled to his feet.

Only in that same moment, a sound pulsed in upon him. . . a high, thin, wailing sound that rose in sudden sharp crescendo.

Burke spun round.

But before he could even place

the noise, the earth beneath his feet began to shake. A roar, louder and deeper than the bellow of a thousand angry bulls, thundered up to counterpoint the wail.

Simultaneously, light flared, so blinding bright Burke had to throw up his arms to shield his eyes.

The glare seemed to come from the southeast, off in the direction where Mount Lasithi's rocky pinacles rose.

Mount Lasithi, whose towering, cliff-girt bastions shielded the sacred Cave of Zeus. . .

While Burke cringed, the radiance seemed to fade a little. The earth-shaking roar diminished also. The shrill wail struck a slightly less ear-piercing note.

Another moment, and Burke dared to squint skyward once more.

What he saw made the hair stand up along the back of his neck.

For off there, to the southeast, a great spray of light radiated out from Mount Lasithi. Before his very eyes, the whole crest seemed to split asunder. Rocky buttresses crumbled. Great crags and ledges split away.

Up from among them rose a huge, flattened, metallic cone—the blue-white ship at which Burke had stared in awe brief hours before.

LIGHT PULSED from it now, as if it were a miniature sun. Rock fell away from the craft in avalanches as it broke free of the mountain.

Now the light drew into a single, broad, fan-shaped shaft that thrust down from the ship's base to the rugged terrain of the shattered mountain below. The thing began to climb, faster and faster.

Then, as it gained altitude, it swung round in a tremendous, wheeling circle. . . swung round, and then straightened, and lanced earthward once more, straight for the flaming tumult that was Knossos.

Burke threw himself flat in the dirt.

It was wasted caution. He might as well not have been there. The alien ship went wide of him by miles.

Another moment, and it was hovering over Knossos; leveling off till its base was parallel to the ground below.

Slowly, slowly, then it descended, riding down on its fan-shaped shaft of light till it hung bare feet above the tops of the buildings. For an instant, Burke thought it must surely be going to land.

But no. For suddenly, the light-shaft pulsed brighter by a dozen, a hundred, a thousand times. The ship spun in a low, flat circle that

carried it over the entire area of the palace and surrounding grounds in seconds.

Then the wailing sound went shrill again—so shrill Burke clapped his hands over his ears. The ship peeled away from the palace and lanced into the sky like an electron-streak. In a flash, it was gone—gone from Knossos, from Crete, from Earth itself. . . a dim and distant pinpoint, sparkling as it faded away, incredibly fast, into the night.

Numbly, Burke turned once more to the palace.

So far as he could see from this vantage-point, no sign of life remained. It was as if a giant hammer had smashed down on it; reduced it to a heap of tumbled stone. Even the fires were dead.

And Ariadne—?

Burke couldn't let himself think about her. Better to marvel at the alien ship, with its pulsing power that shattered mountains and wiped out cities. Better to grope for some bitter tendril of satisfaction that at last he'd learned the truth about the palace's destruction.

As if that would do him any good now.

Because always, always, fight as he might against it, Ariadne was in his mind and heart alike.

Yet perhaps she'd survived. After all, he'd not been able to

find her in her quarters. And she'd promised to meet him—where was it?—on the headland to the left of the mouth of the River of Amnisus.

At least, hunting for her would give him something to do; something to occupy his muscles and maybe, even, a small part of his brain.

So, now, he rose; turned towards the sea.

It was nearly dawn before he found his way to the headland. By then, the wind had died; and the sky in the east lay grey as the whispering, slate-colored waves.

A spark of tension came to life within Burke. Suddenly eager, heedless of fatigue, he clawed his way to the headland's highest point and scanned the whole area.

No sign of Ariadne.

The spark flickered; died. Dully, Burke stared out across the shadowy sea.

His life from now on would be like that: grey; all grey.

It didn't even matter that now he could see the hidden pattern behind the rise of Bronze Age Crete.

The alien ship's presence was, of course, the key.

Obviously, that ship had brought the biggest part of so-called Minoan culture with it. That was why Cretan civilization had flower-

ed so incredibly fast. Perhaps even the Minoans themselves had arrived on Earth aboard the craft, as dry-land slaves in the service of masters better adapted to a liquid environment.

Why had the aliens come? That was a question harder to answer. But whether because of external foes or internal problems, the creatures had been looking for a new world to colonize. And since the Mediterranean teemed with octopi, Cephalopoda, no doubt Crete had offered advantages. Maybe there'd been experiments—attempts to cross-breed the superior, telepathic aliens with the less - highly - developed native octopi. Or perhaps the intruders had merely sought to adapt themselves to life in water, rather than the smelly stuff in the Labyrinth tank.

In any case, they'd held Crete for a long, long time — the way they'd buried their ship in the heart of Mount Lasithi proved that.

Minos, in turn, had played the role of a Quisling, power-hungry intermediary between his own race and the aliens. To hold his kingdom, he'd had Daedalus build the Labyrinth, to serve as quarters for the alien overseer who, in the guise of oracle, held final power in Knossos. And when a human host for this octopodal commandant had been demanded — a man to serve

as transportation for the creature — Minos had blackened his wife's name and dedicated his imbecile son to the duty.

Or perhaps he hadn't. Perhaps he'd done the things he'd done reluctantly, and only in order to save his people from alien wrath such as had struck tonight.

In any case, the death of the alien in the Labyrinth had served as trigger for the disaster. One of their number slain, the extraterrestials no doubt had concluded Earth unsafe, and so had fled back to the outer space from which they'd come.

Which meant that the alien's slayer was also responsible for Knossos' fall . . . the death that had struck down all the hundreds trapped in the now - blighted palace area tonight.

Burke shivered.

Only there was another side to that, too.

For instance, suppose he'd stayed in his own time; never come to Crete, nor slain the Minotaur?

Where would that leave Earth? As an alien outpost, overrun with telepathic octopodal horrors, while Man survived as mere serfs to carry out the bidding of the master race?

Again, questions without answers.

Burke's shoulders shook.

But then, while he still stood

brooding — fatigue - worn, lame, half - sick — the first pale fingers of the sun began to touch the horizon with rose.

TURNING, Burke stared down at the river and the tiny port village near its mouth.

As if his move had been a signal, there was a sudden stir of activity. Men hurried to and fro along the water's edge. A Greek long ship pushed out from shore.

Now those aboard the craft hoisted its sail.

A black sail.

Involuntarily, Burke stiffened. —

Because the black sail made it Theseus' ship.

And legend said Theseus left Crete with Ariadne.

Burke ran for the point closest to the water; stared tight-lipped at the long, slim vessel.

Scarlet caught his eye — the scarlet of a woman's bright-striped cloak.

The same cloak Ariadne had swirled for him so prettily, perhaps —?

Burke dived from his point, straight down into the river. With all his strength, he swam to intercept the slowly - drifting long ship.

Now those aboard had glimpsed him. Men pointed. Women's voices rose, thin on the morning breeze.

Burke plowed the water . . .

closer . . . closer . . .

And now a brawny, familiar figure came striding to the bow: Theseus, Hero of Athens.

Burke swam the harder. Just a dozen strokes more—

Almost, it seemed as if he could reach out and touch Theseus.

The Athenian leaned forward — face stiff, teeth bared, eyes bright with malice. Then his arm came up and back, and Burke saw he gripped a spear.

Theseus hurled the weapon in the same instant.

Desperately, Burke tried to throw himself aside.

But the waves, the water, slowed his movements. The spear struck home, deep in his shoulder.

In spite of himself, Burke cried out.

And now Theseus caught up another spear and poised to throw it.

Burke drove the air from his lungs in a gust. He sank like a rock, turning over and over, as the rush of the Amnissus into the sea carried him along.

But at least there were no more spears; and after a long moment when it seemed his lungs must surely burst, he fought his way back to the surface, and drank in air, and then floated till he could grit his teeth and tear Theseus' javelin from his shoulder.

After that, there was the long

swim back to shore — a swim against the current, this time. By the time Burke made it, Theseus' ship was toy - size in the distance.

For his own part, and what with fatigue and pain and loss of blood, Burke wasn't at all sure that he cared whether he lived or died. Stumbling up from the water onto a narrow strip of beach, he crumpled face - down before he'd gone ten steps.

Half in delirium, thinking of Ariadne, he almost sobbed aloud.

The delirium grew. He knew it did, because now he could even hear her calling to him dimly, as from afar.

Only then the voice came closer: "Dion, Dion! Please, my lord Dion, speak to me!"

Hands lifted his head; cradled it in soft arms. Tender fingers smoothed his hair and brushed the sand from his face.

With a tremendous effort, Burke opened his eyes.

And there was Ariadne.

It took him a full minute to know he wasn't dreaming, or in that dark half-world between reality and hallucination.

Then, at last, incredibly, it was true, and she was with him, her salt tears spattering his face faster than she could wipe them away. "Oh, my lord Dion . . ." she whispered, again and again, "My Dion,

my Dion!"

Burke said hoarsely, "Ariadne, what happened? I thought — How'd you get here?"

"How indeed, my lord Dion!" Of a sudden the slim princess was laughing through her tears. "I walked, as you did, though it took me longer, for I wanted to be sure we were free of that dog Theseus before I joined you."

"Free of Theseus —?"

"Of course. When he came seeking me at my quarters in the night I fled, then followed him, till I knew for certain he was aboard his ship."

And that brought up another matter: "But — the cloak — the woman —"

"The woman?" Never had Ariadne looked more a picture of wide-eyed innocence. "I do not understand, my lord."

Burke gave her back stare for stare, holding his tongue; and after a moment, with a sound suspiciously like a giggle, she murmured, "It could not be my maid you mean, could it, my lord?"

"Your maid —?"

"Yes, the peasant girl who found such favor with Theseus." Ariadne's dark eyes held more than a hint of laughter. "I thought it only fitting that he be rewarded for his efforts, Lord Dion. So I wrapped the wench in my cloak and told her

that if she kept her face hidden and played the role of Princess Ariadne long enough and well enough, she might end up as Theseus' queen."

The picture was perfect. Burke laughed till he feared he'd open his wound again.

ARIADNE LAUGHED with him for a moment, then sobered. "I meant what I told her, Lord Dion. She's a clever girl, and Theseus can see no farther than the nearest bed. By the time he reaches Athens, she may have him so in her toils as not to be able to bear the thought of parting from her."

Burke smiled wryly; shook his head. "I'm sorry, Ariadne. It won't work. Theseus isn't going to like being tricked. So when he puts in at Naxos, he'll leave your maid behind."

Ariadne's great eyes widened. "And — Theseus himself —?"

"When he reaches Athens, he'll find his father dead."

"I see." The slim, lovely princess nodded slowly. "And then, you'll go to Athens, and you'll kill him. And after that, if my father, Minos, still lives, you'll kill him, too. And then —"

Burke said, "No, princess."

"No —?" She stared. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm all through killing."

Burke shifted, trying to ease his wound. "You see, Ariadne, I don't need to kill anyone. Because Theseus isn't stupid, really, and after all this trouble here, he's going to settle down and make Athens a good king.

"As for your father, he's alive. But we don't need to worry any more about him. All he's thinking of is avenging himself on Daedalus for helping us. Only Daedalus is going to get away to the court of King Cocalus, in Sicily, and Cocalus' daughter will kill Minos."

It was a long speech. When he'd finished, Ariadne brought up her hands and crossed them on her firm, bared breasts. "It is good to know what the future holds, my lord Dionysus. I thank you."

Quick irritation touched Burke. "Damn it, girl, I'm not —"

He stopped short.

That line he'd half spoken — the one about him not being Dionysus, not a god; just plain Dion Burke?

Was it true, really?

After all, in a world as primitive as this, what was a god but a man who knew spectacularly more than his fellows?

So, wasn't Ariadne maybe right? Wasn't the Dionysus of legend maybe just plain Dion Burke, twentieth century man, set down in Bronze Age Crete with his name corrupted

to fit the language and the era?

And in that case —

Ariadne squirmed a little and began to smooth his hair again. Her hand trembled, ever so slightly. Her voice, too. She whispered, "My lord, this talk of days to come — would you tell me about — about —"

"About you, you mean? About your own future?"

Ariadne hid her face. Her words came tremulous and muffled. "Yes, yes, my lord!"

Burke couldn't help but smile a little. It was a good thing he practically knew his classical mythology by heart.

And there was nothing quite like time travel to make a man's predictions work out.

Shifting, he brought his good arm up so he could hold Ariadne. Then, very gently, he began: "You needn't fear, my princess. You and I — we'll go to Lemnos, make our home there. Then, we'll have four children — Thoas, Staphylus, Oenopion, Peparthus. . ."

It was a good story, even if somewhat foreshortened by the fact that Ariadne stopped it with her lips.

Then, abruptly, she halted the new activity, too, saying, "My lord Dionysus, Lemnos is a far place. We'd better try to find a ship before the sun climbs higher into

the sky."

Together, they got up, then, and moved slowly down the beach to-

wards the tiny harbor town.

As for the sun, Burke decided it had never shone on a finer day.



"Hey Herb, do you know anything about mushrooms?"

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The Hostile Survivors

by

A. Bertram Chandler

Kalshaw was one of the lucky ones when the space liner exploded — he was still alive; so was a girl — who preferred to see him dead!

KALSHAW WAS ONE of the lucky ones when the interstellar liner, *Star of India*, blew up. He was in his cabin at the time, in his bunk, and was reading an historical novel borrowed from the ship's library. Most of the other passengers, together with the officers not on duty, were at the dance being held in the Main Lounge — but Kalshaw was not a dancing man, neither was he any great lover of people.

A giant hand slammed him down into his mattress, a violent concussion almost ruptured his eardrums. All the lights went out.

I am blind, he thought confusedly. He stumbled out of his bunk, groped uncertainly around the little cabin. It was all very confusing — something had happened to upset *Star of India's* rotation around her longitudinal axis; there was no longer any centrifugal force, neither,

therefore, was there any longer the comforting illusion of gravity. Kalshaw didn't like free fall. Had he not been so frightened he would have been sick.

At last his fingers found the switch of the emergency light. He was not, he was relieved to discover, blind. Moving clumsily, with a great deal of wasted effort, he climbed into his clothing. He struggled with the door, got it open at last. He pulled himself into the alleyway.

Horried, he stared at the fantastic creature confronting him — the giant bat with the dead white human face, hanging head downwards, the black, dark shadowed eyes staring into his. Then he remembered that the dance was to have been a fancy dress dance, and remembered, too, that with the failure of the artificial gravity there was neither up nor down.



Slowly the bat woman turned over, steadying herself at last by gripping Kalshaw's shoulders with her hands. Now that she was right side up she looked less weird, looked like what she was — an attractive young woman in fancy costume dress, a badly frightened young woman.

"What happened?" she demanded. "I came to my cabin to get a handkerchief — then there was an explosion . . ."

"I don't know," Kalshaw said.

"We're isolated here," she went on. "There's just this stretch of alleyway, and six cabins. The airtight doors are shut . . ."

"Perhaps we can get them open," he said.

He disengaged her hands from his shoulders, half scrambled, half floated along the alleyway. She followed him, although with rather more grace than he was exhibiting. They came to the nearest airtight door. It was, as she had said, shut. Its inner surface was covered with white, gleaming frost. Kalshaw turned, made his way back along the alleyway. The other door was in a similar condition.

"It's just as well," he said, "that you couldn't open those doors. Judging by the frost there's nothing on the other side of them but interstellar space. . ."

"But that can't be," she said.

"The ship must still be . . . intact. The lights are still burning. . ."

"The emergency lights," he corrected her. "As I remember it, each section of the ship has its own batteries." He paused. "Each section of the ship has its own lifeboat . . ."

"I'm not leaving the ship," she said flatly.

"Aren't you?" he asked. "These batteries won't last forever, you know. And we're losing heat fast. Furthermore — what about radio-activity? We don't know what caused the explosion, and for all we know every second we stay here increases our chances of getting a lethal dose. Look!" he went on, pointing to a short cross alleyway, "that's where the boat is. We'll go to it, we might, at least, get some sort of information on its radio — it's obvious that the P.A. System is out of kilter."

THEY GOT INTO THE BOAT without any trouble. Kalshaw was careful to shut all airtight doors behind them - he was no spaceman, but he was the sort of traveller who familiarises himself with the workings of all lifesaving appliances, who reads any and every printed notice.

The boat was roomy enough — after all it was certified as being fit to carry thirty people in con-

ditions of maximum safety without too much discomfort. He found the radio, switched it on after he had read the instructions. Almost at once a voice came through the speaker. It was the voice of one of the officers - the slightly sing-song accent with its hissed sibilants made that obvious. It was the voice of a junior officer, a very badly frightened junior officer.

"... all survivors. Calling all survivors. Make sure that there are no people remaining in your sectors of the ship, then activate the launching mechanism. The boats will stay together. Calling all survivors. Notify me at once of your names and boat numbers. Wait! I will run through the boats in numerical order. Number One, Boat Number One . . ." There was a long silence. The voice laughed then, a little hysterically. "Silly. It's my own boat. Number Two . . . Number Two . . ."

A new voice answered, "Ram Singh, Assistant Purser, in charge. Seven passengers—Mr. and Mrs. McCallum, Mr. Spirov, Miss Wong, Mr. and Mrs. Angelo and Miss Angelo . . ."

Number Three did not reply, neither did Number Four. Number Five replied, and Number Six.

"Number Seven," said Kalshaw. "No ship's personnel present. Only two passengers — Mr. Kalshaw

and Miss . . . Miss . . ."

"Grant," said the girl.

"Miss Grant," finished Kalshaw.

"Are you sure that there are no more in your sector?" asked the officer.

"Yes," said the girl, pushing Kalshaw away from the microphone. "I looked in every cabin."

"Thank you. Number Eight, Number Eight . . . Calling Number Eight. . ."

Kalshaw pulled himself into the pilot's seat, adjusted the straps around his waist and over his thighs. He studied the panel of printed instructions over the control board. He told the girl to get herself into the chair next to his. She did so, having trouble with the stiffly wired wings of her fancy dress as she seated herself.

Kalshaw poised his thumb over the red button marked *Release*, then made a decisive stabbing gesture. Something coughed gently — was it, he wondered, a small explosive charge, or was it compressed air? — and the boat shuddered. The acceleration was very slight, almost unnoticeable.

But the viewports were clear now, were no longer obscured by the walls of the sponson in which the boat had been stowed. Through them shone the stars — the hard, unwinking stars shining against the black emptiness. Vaguely Kalshaw

wondered which of them was Sol, which of them was Antares. It was to Antares III that *Star of India* had been bound. He pushed his vague wonderings to the back of his mind, studied the printed instructions again, located the switch that controlled the lifeboat's gyroscope. He depressed it.

"What are you doing?" demanded the girl.

He did not deign to answer, just watched the stars wheeling slowly across his field of vision, listened to the comforting hum of the machinery that had, miraculously, obeyed his will. *Star of India* swam into sight—or, rather, what was left of her. She was no more than a heap of crumpled debris floating in space. Around her were clustered the boats — six of them. As Kalshaw watched a sponson broke open and another of the tiny craft jetted away from the parent ship.

"Look!" cried the girl unnecessarily, turning in her seat. The fabric of one of her wings brushed Kalshaw's face.

"For the love of God," he said irritably, "take those damned things off!"

"If you say so, *Captain*," she replied sarcastically.

She fumbled with clips and buckles, threw the affair of cloth and wire from her. It landed across the

control panel. Kalshaw swore, grabbed at the useless things, crumpling them in his hands. He heard something click. He heard another, deeper note added to the steady hum of the gyroscope. And then the stars were gone, and the broken ship was gone, and through the viewports there was nothing but blackness.

"IT WAS," said Kalshaw, "your fault."

"It was not," said the girl. "Anyhow, let's not waste time arguing about it. What did you *do*?"

"I did nothing. It was those wings of yours. They fouled the control panel. They pressed the starting button for the Ehrenhaft Drive. . ."

"Which means . . .?" she said.

"Which means," he said, "that we ride a line of magnetic force until we land up in the planetary system from which it originates. Then the automatic selector mechanisms — or survival mechanisms — of this boat take over. If there's a planet there capable of supporting human life we land. If not — then I just have to line the boat up again what I think is the right way and try again."

"You might," she said, "have lined the boat up for Antares in the first place. You might have waited for orders from that officer

who seemed to be in charge."

"You might," he replied, "have had the sense not to enter a lifeboat wearing a pair of dummy wings."

"If you hadn't told me to take them off," she said, "this would never have happened."

"Shut up!" he bawled. "Let me think!"

"Not before time," she said acidly. "Still — not to worry. There'll probably be a few months — or years — for you to do your thinking in. Meanwhile, I suppose that the great brain must be fed. I'm going to investigate the commissariat of this boat."

"Go, then," he snarled.

He did not look at her as she unstrapped herself from her seat. He pulled a book — the Manual of Instructions for Lifeboat Crews — from its clips, opened it and started to read. He discovered that the system of air and water regeneration was, as it was in a big ship, entirely automatic. He discovered that the food supply was limited, but that algae could be nourished on sewage and processed to make human food, and that the necessary algae to start the cycle were stowed on board, needing only water and nutriment to arouse them from their suspended animation. He discovered that the boat's rocket drive was chemically powered and

that there was fuel sufficient for one landing only. He discovered that the Ehrenhaft Drive was dependent upon the batteries, and that the batteries could be recharged only by the expenditure of rocket fuel.

He discovered that the authors of the Manual were not very optimistic of the chances of the discovery of an already colonised planet by boat crews ignorant of the art of navigation. He learned that Interstellar Law had taken due cognisance of this fact.

She came back into the little control room; carrying two bulbs of coffee. She handed him one.

"I hope you like sugar," she said.

"I don't," he said ungraciously.

"Then let's have your bulb back. I'll empty it, and bring you some unsweetened coffee."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he said sharply. "We haven't an unlimited supply of coffee. We haven't an unlimited supply of anything — except, perhaps, air and water, which we shall be using over and over again. We have to economize . . ."

"All right," she said. "Give me the bulb back, anyhow. It can be reheated next time I have coffee. I'll bring you some fresh."

He watched her go. The bat woman's costume left little to the

imagination, especially now that the concealing wings were gone. Her legs, in their black tights, were long and slim and shapely. The short black tunic emphasized every curve of her body:

It's a pity, he thought, that we just don't like each other.

She returned with the fresh bulb of coffee. He took it from her, put the tube to his mouth and sipped. He felt better, more clearheaded, after the first mouthfuls of the hot fluid.

He told her what he had learned from the Manual. He told her of the legal aspects involved.

"Marry you?" she flared. "Marry you, of all men? I'll tell you something, Mr. Kalshaw. I'll tell you why I was aboard the *Star of India*. Antares III, for me, was just a stopover point. My passage was booked on from there, out towards the Rim, to the frontier worlds. I left Earth because I wanted to find a real man for a husband, not a book keeper!"

"All right," said Kalshaw. "So I'm a book keeper. But that doesn't alter the fact that I'm in charge of this lifeboat."

"By what right?" she demanded. "Because you're a *man*?"

"Yes," he said.

She laughed scornfully.

"You're the only man here — but that's not enough."

And then she was gone.

THE LIVING SPACE of the lifeboat was divided into two compartments — that forward incorporating the little control room, that aft the tiny galley. The girl made it plain from the start that the after compartment was her territory, and that Kalshaw was not to trespass in it. She condescended to prepare his meals — such as they were — at set times, telling him that she did this merely that he should have no excuse for invading her territory.

Kalshaw didn't like the arrangement. At times, as he lay on the settee that he was using as a bed, trying to sleep, he considered doing something about it. He allowed himself to wonder if the Grant woman would think any more highly of him if he did — then told himself that any sort of scuffle would be beneath his dignity as a civilized man.

On such occasions as he had tried to put his foot down he had been worsted. One such occasion had been a bitter argument concerning the necessity for conserving the stocks of food; the girl had pointed out, with some justice, that the boat, with only two people aboard, was over-provisioned and that there was no point in their eating converted sewage until they had to.

So the days, as measured by the lifeboat's chronometer, dragged by. Kalshaw tried hard to figure out where they were, where they were going—but as he had not noticed the ship's heading when the Ehrenhaft Drive had been switched on he had no data upon which to base his calculations — neither, he admitted, would his calculations have been of much value in any case. Now and again the girl would make scornful reference to his capabilities as a navigator—and on these occasions he fought hard to subdue the anger rising within him.

He was relieved when he was awakened from an uneasy sleep by the clangour of the alarm bells. He knew what it signified — that the boat had ridden the lines of force to their origin and was now circling a planet. He hastily unstrapped himself from the couch, pulled himself to the viewports.

The formless blackness and the swirling lights were, he saw gone — in their place was the normal blackness of Space, and the glittering stars. None of the constellations were familiar. Over to starboard was a planet — looking the same size as does Earth from the Moon. Kalshaw strained his eyes but could make out no seas, no land masses. The lifeboat was on the night side of the world.

"Don't waste time staring!" said

the girl bitterly. "Find out something about this world, will you?"

He was about to ask her how, when he noticed that the little red light over the Information Panel was blinking steadily. He turned the switch to *Oral*.

"We are in a closed orbit around the world you see below you," said a metallic voice. "It's mass is point nine two of that of Earth. Night temperature on the Equator twenty degrees Centigrade, at the Poles minus thirty degrees Centigrade."

The voice stopped abruptly.

"What about air, water?" asked Kalshaw. "What about animal life?"

"Don't be a fool," said the girl. "You can't talk to a machine."

"A spectroscopic examination," went on the voice, "will be made as soon as we are on the sunlit side of this world. Meanwhile, I must report that there is no evidence whatsoever of artificial illumination."

A crescent of blinding fire grew along the rim of the dark of the world. Dark filters snickered softly as they slid into place over the view ports. The crescent of fire contracted upon itself, became a great ball of light.

"A Sol-type primary," said the mechanical voice. "Spectroscopic analysis of the atmosphere now under way . . . Atmosphere rich in

oxygen but suitable for human life forms . . . No evidence of waste products either of chemical combustion or of atomic energy . . . All relevant details of analysis are recorded on my tapes . . . Surface of planet 75% land, 25 % water. . . Rich vegetation . . . Probability of animal life, but no sign of intelligence . . . Equatorial temperature thirty one degrees Centigrade . . . Temperate Zones, in summer hemisphere, twenty five degrees Centigrade . . .”

“It looks a good enough planet,” said Kalshaw.

“You can’t see from here,” replied the girl.

“We have to decide,” Kalshaw told her.

“I have decided. I’ve decided that I want no part of a primitive planet with a man who’d be more at home in the suburbs of any big Earth city. We’ll go on — and hope that the next planet we find is more suitable.”

“The search might take years,” said Kalshaw. “And I’ve no intention to spend years in this tin coffin with you!”

He pulled himself to the control board, stretched out his hand to the big switch marked *Automatic Landing*. She caught his arm, tried to pull him away from the controls. He pushed her away savagely. And then they were fighting, the pent

up fury engendered by their weeks together finding its outlet.

Her nails tore his face as they reached for his eyes, her knee caught him in the groin. And that was the last that he remembered until the initial braking blasts wakened him from his madness. The ship was coming in for a landing when he relaxed his efforts to restore consciousness to her, deeply relieved to know that she was not dead after all, that he had not quite strangled her to death.

THE ELECTRONIC BRAIN of the lifeboat had a certain intelligence; it had been designed to take full and complete charge in the all too likely event of the boat’s being filled with a crew of the most hopeless groundlubbers ever to take passage from Earth. In its own quiet way it weighed, evaluated. Nobody had answered its questions regarding the most suitable climate in which to land (the two humans were, at the time, in neither the mood nor the condition to answer polite questions) so it had assumed — insofar as it could assume anything — that one half of the survivors must be Esquimaux and the other half Liberians. Obviously, it could not please both parties — but it could, and did, select a climate in which both hypothetical parties could survive

without too great discomfort. Unluckily the Temperate Zone was singularly deficient in suitable landing places for a rocket plane (for that is what the boat had become on entering the atmosphere) screaming in at almost supersonic speed. Had the electronic brain been human it would have sighed with relief when its keen senses informed it of the long, straight lake gleaming in a sheltered valley among the mountains. . .

Kalshaw looked up from the almost inert body of the girl when the lifeboat hit the water. He saw the white sheets of spray obscuring the viewports. He staggered to his feet, looked out through the nearest port. As the boat slowed the huge bow wave subsided. He saw a white beach sliding past, and rocks, and, in the background, a dense forestry of tall, odd looking trees.

The metallic voice was speaking again.

"The landing has been made. You are now once again in full control of the boat. Enough fuel remains for limited travel on the surface of the water. There is not enough for further flight."

The girl was sitting up now, fingering her bruised throat tenderly. She did not look at Kalshaw.

"Well, what now?" she muttered.

"I'm going to ground the boat,"

said the man. "There's a nice shelving beach ahead and to starboard . . ."

"All right. Do it. Don't yap about it."

Kalshaw ignored her. He had studied the controls during their long flight along the lines of magnetic force. He knew what to do but was wondering if the rocket drive would function with the main venturi under water. There was only one way to find out.

As a matter of fact the drive functioned quite well. It drove the lifeboat with considerable velocity on to a barely submerged pinnacle rock that ripped her bottom out. She sank in deep water at least three hundred yards from the beach. Burdened as he was with the semi-conscious girl it was all Kalshaw could do to swim that three hundred yards.

SHE RECOVERED before he did.

She stood there, tall and straight in the late afternoon sunlight, looking down at him, her hands on her hips. She was still wearing the short black tunic of her bat woman's costume-the tights had long since been discarded.

"Well, my bright suburbanite," she sneered, "what do we do now? Are you taking me to the corner cafe for dinner? Or do you feel like

catching a 'copter for the West End and the bright lights?"

"Lights. . ." he repeated stupidly. Then — "We'd better make a fire . . ."

"Why?"

"Because . . ." he began lamely.

"Because castaways *always* make a fire," she finished for him. "Because it's the conventional thing to do. Go on — rub two pieces of dry stick together. This I shall enjoy watching."

He glowered.

She fumbled in a pocket at the waist of her tunic, brought out a little metallic object.

"It's lucky," she said, "that I've always preferred the old-fashioned type of cigarette. It's lucky that I always carry a lighter . . ." She tossed the lighter from hand to hand. "Here's our fire — when we need it. Come on, now, get up. We have to explore before dark. We have to find if there's a cave or any other sort of natural shelter we can take over. There must be animals on this world as well as plants — and some of them might be dangerous."

He got slowly to his feet. She stood well back, made no attempt to help him. Before he was fully erect she started striding off down the beach. He broke into a staggering run, pushed past her, took the lead.

He did not bother to look back

to see if she was following. He didn't care whether she did or not. As he walked he felt warmer, could feel some of the strength flowing back into his body — but he knew that the unfamiliar pull of gravity would soon tire him.

The white sand beneath his feet was trackless. On his right hand was the forest — and beyond that, he knew, were the snow-covered peaks he had glimpsed from the control room of the lifeboat shortly after the landing. There would be time he thought, to worry about those peaks later — if at all.

The vegetation inshore was not so strange as he had thought at first glance. There were thorny bushes, some of which bore scarlet flowers and some of which sagged under the weight of clusters of white, waxen looking berries. The trees had straight, leafless trunks for fifty feet or so, then burst into an almost globular mop of foliage. Furtive rustlings came from behind the bushes and an occasional chattering sound.

Kalshaw paused as he noticed a shrub of a different type from the others. Starlike, half a dozen straight branches radiated from a common centre, being about as thick as a man's wrist at their base. The man laid both hands on one of them, wrenched and twisted. It was springy, but not too much

so. At last, while the girl stood watching him, he broke it free. He hefted it in his hands. It made a comforting club.

"What about one for me?" she asked.

"Help yourself," he replied. "They're free."

He strode on, conscious that she was wrestling with another of the branches. At last he heard her feet scuffling over the dry sand as she chased after him. He turned back briefly, was grimly amused to see that her strength had not been sufficient to win a club for herself.

Ahead of him a high outcropping of rock ran down to the water's edge. There was a cave there he saw — a black gap in the grey rock face almost as tall as a man. He paused before it — then, hefting his club in his right hand, took a step forward.

She caught his arm.

"Don't be a bigger fool than you have been already. You can't go in there without a light."

He shook her off.

"I'm not afraid of the dark, even if you are."

"Don't be childish!" she almost screamed. She picked up a light, frayed piece of what looked like driftwood. The tiny flame of her lighter was almost invisible in the sunlight. The end of the driftwood smoldered sullenly, then flared

into flame. He took the torch from her, then strode into the cave. She followed.

It was the eyes of the beast that they saw first — two evil, yellow sparks gleaming out of the thick darkness. Then they heard it snarl, heard the dried vegetation that it had gathered for its bed rustle as it poised itself to leap.

Kalshaw had no time to think, no time to feel afraid. The thing was on him in a flash, knocking both club and torch from his hands. The animal's legs were around him (surely there were too many of them) and sharp talons were lacerating his back. The hot breath of it was in his face and he could hear the gnashing of the teeth that sought his throat.

His hands closed round its scaly neck, squeezed and pushed away, but the thing was strong. He felt himself weakening, knew that he could not hold it off much longer.

Something caught him a numbing blow on the shoulder. Something whistled past his right ear, and he heard the thud of the blow as it struck the reptilian beast. Other blows followed, only a few of which hit him. Suddenly he was aware that the throat between his hands was no longer pulsing.

"You can stop," he croaked. "It's dead."

Her face, pale but calm, appeared

ed in the circle of radiance thrown by her lighter. She knelt — but not, as he thought at first, to examine his wounds. She was inspecting the carcass of the late occupant of the cave.

"An ugly brute," she said, "Like a six legged, soft skinned crocodile . . . Drag it out, will you, and pull the legs off. You should be able to manage that — we've no tools for any butchery, anyhow. We'll roast the legs."

"My back," said Kalshaw. "You'd better look at it. This brute dug its claws into it."

She bent over him.

"H'm. There are a few scratches. You'd better come outside."

He got unsteadily to his feet. When it seemed that he might lean upon her she stepped smartly to one side. He staggered out of the cave, supporting himself by his hand on the rough wall. He stripped off his torn, bloodstained shirt, stood there in the last of the sunlight while she examined his back.

"Men," she said. "Not *real* men, but men like you! The fuss they make over trifles!"

"Those scratches — as you call them - might turn septic," he pointed out.

"That'll be just too bad," she said. "Thanks to your having lost the lifeboat we have no antibiotics . . . Get down on your belly

by the edge of the water — I'll wash your back for you. But that's all that I can do."

Her hands were contemptuous, ungentle — but his back, after she had finished washing it, felt clean. Then, at her suggestion, he went back into the cave and dragged out the body of the animal. With a sharp edged stone that he found he succeeded in severing all six legs from the body. The rest of the carcass he got rid of by wading out with it some distance into the lake — there was enough current to carry it away.

"What did you do that for?" she demanded.

"The thing might have a mate — or something else big and hungry might be attracted by the smell of the blood."

"We shall be hungry ourselves tomorrow," she pointed out.

"Better to be hungry than to be eaten," he snarled.

He watched her as she coaxed the fire that she had built into life. He admired the skill with which she constructed a rough spit from suitably shaped pieces of stick, lashing the legs of the monster to it with pieces of strong, tough vine that she had found in the shrubbery.

The meat, as it roasted, smelled good. The upper joint of the legs was plump and juicy. The flesh was

not unlike chicken. Kalshaw and the girl ate two of the legs apiece with relish. The other two they saved for the following day.

She said abruptly, "I'm turning in now. You stay outside and keep the fire going."

"It's better company than you," he said.

When she had gone he looked up at the unfamiliar constellations — it was now long past sunset and the last of the afterglow had almost faded in the west. He looked up to the stars in their strange groupings and tried to identify Sol. He could not. He sat by the fire and stared into the glowing coals. He smiled bitterly. He had read so many stories of shipwreck, so many stories of people being cast away on uninhabited islands and planets — but none of them had been at all like this.

Inside the cave she screamed.

He acted fast, but with deliberation. He picked up a long, dry stick, thrust it into the fire, waited until it was well ablaze. Only then did he run into the cave.

She was cowering, huddled up, in the corner.

"A mouse," she said. "It . . . ran over me . . ."

He kicked the pile of dried fronds on which she had been sleeping. Something ran out — it wasn't a mouse, but it was small, and fur-

ry and, if one discounted the six legs, not too dissimilar from a mouse. Moving with a speed that surprised himself he stooped and struck out with his free hand. His fingers closed on the little, squirming body. He walked to the outside of the cave. Carefully he released the little creature.

"Off you go," he whispered.

"Mr. Kalshaw!" she was calling. "Bill! You aren't going to leave me alone, are you?"

"No," he replied.

SLOWLY, with a great flaring and thunder of her exhausts, the survey ship settled. She did not land on the lake but on a little, rough plateau not far from the cave, a landing place that would have been impossible to any ship making an aircraft type landing.

As she touched down her tripodal landing gear adjusted itself to the rough terrain, one of the great vanes automatically shortening itself, one of the others lengthening. The fires started by her jets died as floods of carbon dioxide poured from her venturi.

High on her side opened an airlock door, and as it opened the rungs of a ladder extruded themselves from her sleek plating. Slowly, carefully, three men clambered down the ladder, stood staring about them.

"Look!" one of them cried, pointing. "I said that the fire we saw was evidence of intelligent life!"

"And humanoid life, too," said the third. "Those are humans!"

"Humanoid be damned," said one of the others.

The man and the woman walking along the beach wore their rags proudly. Each was armed, each was carrying a rifle as though it were a normal accessory to dress, although on the man's back was slung a long, powerful looking bow.

The elder of the three men from the ship — he wore the four gold bands of captaincy on his sleeve — stepped forward, saluted gravely.

"Permission to land, sir?"

"Of course, Captain."

"We had no idea that this planet was colonized — but, of course, communications out towards the Rim aren't what they might be..." He smiled. "I suppose you are colonists?"

The man and the woman spoke at once — one saying *No* and the other *Yes*.

"You mean that?" asked the man. "Do you mean that, Elspeth?"

"Well — aren't we colonists?" she asked.

"If you aren't colonists," asked the Captain, "then what are you?"

"We *were*," said the woman, "survivors from *Star of India*."

"You must have come in a lifeboat," said one of the men from the survey ship.

"We did," said Kalshaw. "It's in the lake, with its bottom ripped out..."

"Bill made a raft," said the woman, "and we used it to dive from. Once we got out one of the space-suits, which we used as a diving suit, we were able to salvage enough in the way of weapons and equipment to make life safer and easier."

The Captain smiled.

"Life will be safe enough and easy enough for you both from now on. I extend to you the hospitality of my ship — and, as soon as the survey of this planet is completed, we blast off for Earth."

Kalshaw looked at his wife, and she looked at him. They linked arms as they faced the men from the ship.

"No, Captain," said Kalshaw firmly. "You can't get us aboard one of those things, not ever again. They blow up."

THE END

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"Looks like a black-breasted erithacus migratorius."



Skid Row Pilot

by

Randall Garrett

Flunking a physical was the greatest worry a space pilot had. It was the one worry Kendall never bothered about—until he landed on Mars . . .

TED KENDALL WAITED with thinly-concealed impatience in the unheated outer office of Mars' branch of Space

Service, cursing the red tape that kept him anchored on this cold, miserable pebble of a planet.

"We'll have that analysis in just



a moment, Pilot Kendall," came the voice from the inner office. "Please, be patient."

"I'll try," Kendall growled bitterly.

Actually, he thought, it was his own fault. A spacepilot had to have a reflex checkup every six months, to determine whether or not he was still capable of the myriad split-second decisions that had to be made during the course of the Earth-Mars run.

Kendall's six-month exam had been scheduled to fall due about four days after he left Earth for his present run. A midflight due-

date of this sort gave him an option: he could take the test four days early, on Earth, or he could wait till the journey was completed and be tested at the Mars end of the run.

He had chosen Mars, since otherwise he would have had to give up his assignment on the *Queen Alexandra* and wait to draw another. He was in good health, his reflexes were fine, and he didn't expect to hit any snags on the Mars end.

Not much, he thought.

He rose and walked toward the door. "How's that machine of yours

coming?"

"We're still computing your curve, Pilot Kendall. It'll take just another moment or two."

Frowning, he took his seat again. He hadn't looked for this sort of trouble on Mars.

The Martian branch of Space Service didn't work with the same smooth efficiency as the Earth office. There, you walked in, let the computer run you over, and in ten minutes your license was stamped for another six-month extension. Here things worked differently.

It had taken him two days just to get an appointment — two days in which he wandered through Mars City, lonely and bitter, shuddering in the biting cold and feeling homesick for Earth and Kathy and good warm air with some oxygen in it. Then he had his exam — and, unaccountably, they requested him to return the next day for a re-test.

A re-test? What the devil for? When Kendall had returned, he had been shivering not only with the cold of Mars but with apprehension. He looked at his hands. They seemed to be steady. Were his reflexes wearing out? Was he washed up as a space-pilot? He didn't know. The machine was going to tell him that soon enough.

The door opened. A white-smocked computer technician wear-

ing the comet-insignia of Space Service came out, frowning uneasily and riffling a sheaf of papers. Kendall stood up.

"It's about time; I'd like to get going on my return run. Where's my license?"

The technician stared at him strangely for a moment. "I'm sorry, Mr. Kendall. I can't give you your license. The computer shows that you're no longer fit to pilot a spacegoing vessel."

FOR AN INSTANT Kendall didn't react. Then it hit him. The technician had called him *Mr. Kendall* instead of *Pilot Kendall*. That meant only one thing.

He blinked and shook his head. "You're kidding. This is some kind of joke. I never felt better in my life."

"I'm just doing my job, Mr. Kendall. The computer says no — and I can't argue. I'll have to refuse you an extension of your certificate."

"But that means — hell, man, the *Alexandra's* due to blast off for Earth tonight! How —"

"We've already alerted an off-duty pilot to take your place, Mr. Kendall."

Numbly he said, "And how do I get back to Earth then? Hitchhike?"

"There's room on the passenger

list of the *Queen Alexandra*, Mr. Kendall. The fee is — let me see — eight thousand dollars.”

“Eight thous —” He stopped. As a cashiered-out spaceman he was entitled to a fat pension: five thousand a year for the rest of his life. But eight thousand right now would wipe out his savings, would —

No. Sudden rage surged through him.

“Dammit, let me see those papers! This is a fake! Somebody wants me out of the Service, that’s all! Six months ago I had a perfect test!”

The clerk smoothly put the papers behind his back. “I’m sorry, regulations forbid —”

“To hell with regulations! I’m going to be thrown out, do you understand? I want to see those test results!”

“It’s imposs —”

Kendall leaped.

The clerk went wide-eyed in astonishment as the burly spaceman sprang for him. He jumped back, and Kendall landed just before him. Kendall ripped a fist up from his knees and smashed it into the man’s jaw, taking out all his fury and resentment on the harmless clerk. The pale man crumpled and sagged backward, mouthing stunned syllables.

Kendall hit him again and he

fell.

“I want those papers!” He jumped forward atop the man, tried to turn him over, get the computer reports still clutched in the technician’s hand. Blind rage swept over him. The clerk, dazed and near unconsciousness, hung on to them grimly.

Kendall felt hands dig into his shoulderblades.

“Get off him,” someone growled. A knee thudded against his back, sending showers of sparks before his eyes. “Get up!”

He was dragged to his feet. Three powerful-looking Martian policemen stood over him, fingering heavy wooden truncheons ominously.

“What’s the trouble here?” one of them asked. He was a blue-skin nearly seven feet tall. He must have weighed three hundred pounds, and it was all muscle.

“Someone’s trying to swindle me —” Kendall began.

“Let *him* speak, buddy. He works here.”

“This man,” the clerk said, “is a former employee of Space Service. He was just notified of his discharge, and for some reason decided to take it out personally on me.”

“That so? Okay, friend. Come on with us.”

“No.” Kendall snapped. He bolt-

ed past the big blueskin and started wildly for the door — but a hand caught him. He was dragged back. An open palm, calloused and horny, crashed into his face. Then another. Then a fist knocked the air out of his stomach. He doubled up.

"Get away from me," he muttered, lashing out with fists and feet. The three blueskins laughed harshly and closed in. Their blows descended one after another. Kendall spun dizzily, bellowing in anger and pain, and started to topple.

It isn't fair, he thought in the last dim moment of consciousness. *It just isn't fair.*

HE WOKE UP shivering, feeling as if a planet or two had fallen on him.

Those blueskins do a job when they beat a man up, he thought.

Stiffly he rolled over. The chilling winds of Mars came roaring down to bite at him. He was lying in the gutter outside the Space Service office, sprawled out with one hand lying casually along the sidewalk like any drunk's. He was numb all over. Numb and cold.

Slowly he began to remember why he was down here in the gutter, and anger began to warm him. He was washed-up. Through. At twenty-seven his career as a space-pilot was over, and he had been booted out of the Space Service

office without ceremony.

Worse than that — he was stuck here on Mars with about ten dollars in his pocket. It would cost eight thousand to get back home. Eight thousand — and Kathy with a baby coming, and him with no job now. It was enough to make a man kill himself.

He started to pull himself wearily to his feet, but his aching muscles wouldn't support him and he sagged into a limp heap on the side of the curb. His head dropped into his hands. A couple of tearless sobs shook him.

A man ought to be better prepared for things like this, he told himself. One minute a top-flight spaceman; then a machine gives you a few tests and you're nothing but a bum sobbing in the gutter.

A hand touched his shoulder. Instinctively he shrank away. He was in no shape for further fighting.

"Leave me alone," he said hollowly. "You want my wallet, take it. There's ten bucks in it."

"But I don't want your wallet, Pilot Kendall. I want to help you."

Slowly Kendall turned his aching neck and looked up. The speaker was a blueskin, tall and broad like all his race. He was looking down, smiling warmly.

"You can't call me *Pilot* Kendall. I'm not a pilot any more."

"That's only temporary," the blueskin said. "Come with me to Das Shamra, and perhaps something can be arranged."

Kendall came awake instantly. He rose to his feet — and his six-three was dwarfed by the blueskin's towering height. "What the hell is this? Who's this Das Shamra, and what can he arrange for me?"

"Das Shamra is a wealthy merchant, Pilot Kendall. Wealth has many advantages. Will you come with me?"

Suspiciously, Kendall said, "Where to?"

"The Hotel Cosmos. Das Shamra is very anxious to see you. He is a very generous man."

Kendall had been long taught never to trust a blueskin. But in his present state of mind, he didn't give much of a damn. He was numb with cold, and whoever this Das Shamra was, he was indoors. At the moment that was all that mattered.

"Buy me a drink," Kendall told the Martian. "I need a little pick-me-up. Then you can take me to Das Shamra."

THE BLUESKIN and Kendall stopped off at a bar at the corner. The Martian ordered a mug of the insipid Mars beer; Kendall smirked at the brownish-green li-

quid and said to the barkeep, "Give me a double *valdoz*."

"Sure thing, friend."

"You're really going in for the strong stuff, aren't you?" the Martian asked, as the drink arrived.

"The way I feel, I need it. Besides, why settle for that sludge you call beer when the drinks are on the house?"

"A good point," the Martian admitted. "Das Shamra can afford it." He drained his beer, and, as Kendall poured the fiery *valdoz* down his throat, the blueskin said, "Have another. I'll pay."

"No thanks," Kendall said. "*Valdoz* isn't something you swill like beer. And I'd just as soon face Das Shamra sober, thank you. Let's go."

The Martian spun a coin and left it on the counter. They went out into the street again — but with the potent brew within him, Kendall felt much happier about having to face the Martian winds.

He was just a little unsteady. The beating had helped, of course, and so had the drink. Normally he wasn't a drinking man; alcohol played hell with the reflexes, and his reflexes were his most valued property. But not any more, he thought dully. Not now, when he'd been kicked out of the Service.

The blueskin led him down the twisting byways of Mars City,

through heaps of filth and dark alleys. Mars was an old planet, cold and arid; its cities were thousands of years old, its people well skilled in the arts of evil. It wasn't the sort of planet an Earthman liked to stay on for long.

Kendall scowled. The way it looked, he'd be here longer than he was counting on. Hell, it would cost fifty dollars just to radio Earth and tell Kathy what had happened.

But he couldn't tell her. Not now, when she was about to have the baby. Not when she was so proud of the spaceman she saw only a few weeks out of each year. How could he tell her that he'd flunked the six-month exam?

"In here," the Martian said. "Das Shamra's suite is upstairs."

The Hotel Cosmos looked to Kendall like one of the better establishments on Mars. But even so, it wasn't very appetizing. Its hallways were dark and narrow: occasionally a groan or a harsh whisper could be heard coming from behind a thick wooden door. He didn't like the place.

"This is the floor," the blueskin said.

He opened the door and stepped inside. Moving cautiously, ready to turn tail and get out if something looked wrong, Kendall followed him.

The blueskin knelt. "This is Pilot Kendall."

"Pleased to meet you, Pilot Kendall," said an immensely fat Martian humped in an encircling web-work cradle. His small eyes were burned in rings of fat; his slit-like mouth was spread in a broad, unsavory grin. "I am Das Shamra," he said, in a deep, harsh voice.

Kendall poised himself on the balls of his toes, waiting uncertainly. "Why did you bring me here?"

"All in good time. Sit down, won't you? Care for a drink?"

He indicated a dark bottle of *voldoz* by his side. Kendall shook his head immediately.

"No, I don't want any."

"Ah, I see. A spacepilot must beware lest he damage the all-important reflexes. Very well, then; I shall drink alone unless you object."

"Go right ahead," Kendall said tightly. "And I'm not worried about my reflexes. I just want to keep a clear head while you tell me whatever you want to tell me."

"You sound as if you don't trust me," Das Shamra wheezed. His fat body quivered as the liquor went down. "A most unfortunate attitude."

Kendall-drummed on the edge of his chair impatiently. "You sent your boy out to bring me here.

What for?"

The Martian smiled bleakly at him. "How badly would you like to get back to your native world, Mr. Kendall?"

Kendall was silent for a moment. Then he said, "What the hell do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm aware of your unfortunate run-in with several of the local police this morning. They happened to be in my employ, and they told me your motive for causing a disturbance. I offer my sympathies, Mr. Kendall."

He's dropped the Pilot, Kendall thought. *Now it's just plain Mister.*

"Okay, you know then. Sympathy isn't enough."

"I'm aware of that," Das Shamra said. "But is eight thousand dollars enough?"

Kendall stiffened. "Eight thousand dollars is exactly the passage-fee back to Earth," he said. "It happens to be exactly the sum I need." His voice was cold and flat.

Das Shamra grinned affably. "Indeed? Then we can talk business — for eight thousand dollars happens to be exactly the sum I'm prepared to offer you if you do a certain job for me."

"What kind of a job?"

"Piloting a spaceship."

"But that's impossible —" Kendall started to say, and stopped.

By law, all space commerce was to-be handled through Space Service and its authorized pilots. There was a reason for that; a spaceship out of control could destroy half a continent in a crash landing, and-so only authorized personnel could be permitted to handle spacecraft. No private piloting was allowed.

But it might be worthwhile to hear him out. "Go on," Kendall said. "Give some details."

"First I must know if your interested."

"I might be. Talk away."

The Martian's chubby face was darkened momentarily by a frown. "Very well," he said. "Here's the job: a cargo of dionate extract is going to be unloaded at Phobos Depot tomorrow night. Some — friends of mine — are actively interested in securing this cargo. They've gone to the extent of securing a small spacecraft for the purpose of intercepting the incoming ship. Unfortunately, we Martians are completely unable to operate the ship, inasmuch as Earth's Space Service has reserved interplanetary commerce as a monopoly for itself. However, you are both a skilled pilot and a free agent without loyalty to the organization that so rudely ejected you. Therefore —"

Dionate extract was the newest of

the wonder drugs. A cargo of it was probably worth millions. "You want me to pilot a hijack ship, is that it?"

"Not so loud, please. Yes, that's it, crudely."

"It won't work, Das Shamra. I'm not a qualified spaceman any more. The computer said I don't have the reflexes — and computers don't lie. There's no telling what might happen if I got behind the control panel of a spaceship."

Das Shamra squinted one eye contemplatively. "And what if your lack of reflexes were a temporary condition — one that perhaps could be remedied by some Martian medical genius? Would you take the job, then — eight thousand dollars, and a chance to re-enter the Space Service."

"You mean you think you can cure me?"

"I'm sure of it."

Kendall stood up. His nostrils quivered; he hung on the brink of decision. It was tempting — but part of him argued that it was a filthy crime, that he'd never be able to live with himself afterward. So what if he got the eight g's and was able to return to Earth? Could he ever face Kathy and the kid, knowing that he had returned home because of — of —

"No," he said. "I like the price, but I won't do it."

He turned and headed for the door. Das Shamra uttered a quick, curt syllable and the Martian who had found him suddenly stepped out of the shadows.

"You know too much to leave now," he said.

Kendall didn't bother to reply. He kicked out viciously with his heavy booted foot, then leaped into the air to drive a fist into the Martian's mouth. Teeth crunched. The blueskin yelled in pain, and Kendall heard the thunder of Das Shamra pounding across the floor toward him.

He threw open the door and dashed out into the filthy corridor. He found the stairs, and raced down them without looking back, out into the cold, chill late-afternoon air.

H E RAN. He didn't know how far he ran, nor how long. All he knew was that he paced through the narrow streets of Mars City for block after squalid block, feeling his heart pounding as if trying to break through the cage of his ribs. Finally, exhausted, he paused on a street-corner, gasping for breath, and looked around.

He wasn't being followed. Not now. But he knew his life wasn't going to be worth much unless he got off Mars in a hurry. And he had no way of doing that. He couldn't even radio Earth for mon-

ey. There was no such thing as a collect call between planets — the cost of transmission was too great to risk a refusal — and in his present battered condition he knew he would never find anyone who'd lend him enough to call Kathy.

His shoulders slumped despondently. A neon sign said, "BAR" and he decided to go in. For six years in the Space Service he had kept away from liquor. He had plenty of lost time to make up for now.

He took a seat at a table in the rear. When the bartender approached, he said "Double *valdoz*. Straight."

Kendall slouched and nursed the drink, then ordered another. And another. Drinks were cheap, on Mars.

After a while another Earthman came over and hovered by Kendall's ear. "Mind if I sit with you a while, friend?"

"Go right ahead. The seat's free."

The newcomer was a man in his late thirties, seedy and weary looking. A week's growth of beard sprouted on his face. He was, Kendall knew, an ex-spacer living from day to day on Mars, probably looking for a handout. Kendall shuddered. He saw his own future staring him in the face.

"I'm almost out of cash," he

said. "I can't buy you a drink."

"Didn't ask for one. I'll pay for my own. Just want company. Someone to talk to."

It developed, after a while, that the newcomer was — as Kendall had guessed — a former spaceman. He, like Kendall, had flunked his six-month test between legs of an Earth-Mars run. That had been four years ago. He was still here, doing menial jobs to stay alive.

"That's okay," Kendall said, slurring his words. He had already had much too many *valdoz* doubles. "I won't live long. Some bigwig here is out for my neck."

"What for?"

Kendall explained what Das Shamra had wanted, and what the outcome had been. The old spacer grinned.

"Funny. Same thing happened to me. I said no, and they let me go. It's an old trick, planting a distorter in a man."

"*What?*" Kendall was suddenly sober. "Distorter? What do you mean?"

He reached across the table and shook the older man.

"Lemme alone. I'll tell you. It's a dodge they use to get men to flunk out. Least they tried it on me; I didn't find out what they did till later. They're damned clever surgeons. They slip up on a spacer when he's asleep and bury

a neural distorter on his body. It louses up his reflexes so he flunks the six-monther. They spring the job offer on him. If he takes it, they remove the distorter and he's as good as new. If he turns it down — well, then he finishes like me.”

“How come you haven't reported this?”

“What's the use? Who'd believe me? Hey, wait a minute! You didn't finish your drink!”

BUT KENDALL HAD DASH-
ed the full length of the bar, dropped a crumpled bill on the counter, and raced outside. He snagged a taxi.

“Hotel Cosmos, in a hurry.”

The driver, a sneering blueskin, said, “Five bucks. Earthmen pay in advance.”

Kendall cursed and dug into his pocket. He had five dollars and change. He handed the blueskin the bill, pocketed the few coins again, and got in.

Minutes later he was outside the Hotel Cosmos. He threaded his way to Das Shamra's suite, listened outside the door for an instant. Voices were talking, murmuring low in Martian.

He knocked.

“Who's there?” a harsh voice said.

“Kendall. The Earthman. I came back.”

“Put your hands up,” came the voice. “When the door opens, enter slowly.”

“Okay.” He raised his hands.

Slowly the door opened. Kendall peered in and found himself facing enough artillery to blow a hole in Jupiter. There were five Martians in the room, none he had seen before, and each had a blaster trained on him. Das Shamra was sitting in his web-chair. There was no sign of the Martian Kendall had clobbered.

“The prodigal returns,” Das Shamra remarked. “To what do we owe this visit, Mr. Kendall?”

Hesitantly, Kendall said, “I've—changed my mind. I'll do your damned job for you.”

“Oh? A strange reversal of philosophy.”

“I can't help it. I just spent some time with some other guy who turned you down. I don't want to end up like him. I want to get home to my wife, and I don't care how I get there. What do you want me to do?”

Das Shamra seemed to purr. “The terms are as we mentioned before.”

“And what about fixing up my reflexes?”

“A simple matter — inasmuch as we happen to be the ones who saw to it that they deteriorated.”

Kendall felt a jaw-muscle throb.

The Martian's cool words confirmed what the old drunk had told him; they had deliberately cooked up this frame.

Das Shamra said, "This is Murro Lignus. He's our surgeon. He's the man who — ah — surreptitiously placed the distorter in your body while you slept at the spaceport last night. He comes and goes with great stealth."

"You cold-blooded swine," Kendall said. "Okay. We'll be honest with each other. I hate you, and you hate me — but I need you to ungimmick me so I can go home, and you need me to help you hijack that dionate. Okay."

"We understand each other, then," Das Shamra said.

"Take your gadget out of me and let me see the ship. I want to check it over before I go up in it."

"Very well. Murro Lignus, apply the anesthetic and remove the distorter."

Kendall shook his head. "No anesthetic. I want to watch this. I can't trust you not to plant some other kind of gadget in me while I'm out."

The fat Martian shrugged. "As you wish. It will be a painful operation, though."

"I'll take my chances on that," Kendall said.

THE OPERATION WAS HELL.

The Martian surgeon had slipped a submicroscopic pellet near the base of Kendall's spine, making use of one of the Martian super-anesthetics. Now there was no anesthetic in use, as Murro Lignus probed for the distorter.

It was fifteen minutes of sheer agony. Finally the Martian murmured, "It's over. You can get up."

Kendall felt bolts of pain shoot through him. Looking around at the watching Martians, he thought, *You'll pay for this. All of you.*

His brain felt clear. He knew the computer would now accept him and restore his certificate. He toyed briefly with the idea of somehow ducking out and getting back to the Space Service office, but he turned that notion down. He wanted to do this up in style.

"We'll take you to the ship," Das Shamra said. "The plan is to lie in wait off Phobos until the dionate ship shows up. Then you can follow our instructions."

"You're the boss," Kendall said. "Until this caper is over, anyway. Then I'm heading back to Earth and you can all rot so far as I care."

They took him far out of town, circled around the outlying districts until he was pretty thoroughly confused, then brought him back.

By now it was night, and the twin moons were in the sky — tiny Phobos, only ten miles in diameter, and Deimos, half her size.

The ship was a small, sleek job, some twenty years old. Where they got it didn't seem evident; possibly they had blackmailed some other pilot into surrendering it, possibly they had hijacked it in some fashion or other.

He climbed aboard, followed by Das Shamra and his five henchmen.

"You'll have to weigh yourselves," he announced. "With all six of you on board I'll have some tricky mass-calculations to do."

It took him a few hours to calculate the orbit, another hour to run a routine check on the ship. It was in beautiful shape, ready to go.

"Strap down for blastoff," he said, when he was satisfied.

The Martians frowned in bewilderment. "We've never been in space," one of them said. "We don't know how to get into the acceleration cradles."

Kendall showed them. Das Shamra lay closest to him, a blaster cradled in his arms. "You're the only one who can move around now, Kendall. One move out of place and I'll drill you."

"Sure you will," Kendall said. "And which one of you is going

to pilot the ship back down again? If you want to live, Das Shamra, keep that blaster from going off."

He nestled down in the control webbing, and readied the ship for blasting. A sharp thrill ran through him, as it always did as he readied a ship for a leap into the great blackness. But there was a special thrill this time. Only hours ago he had resigned himself to a short, dreary few years of life remaining to him on barren Mars; now he was behind the controls of a powerful ship-again.

He touched the power stud. A reassuring throbbing shuddered through the ship.

"We're about to blast off," he said. "Just relax, and it won't bother you much. I'm going to put the ship in orbit around Phobos and then we can wait for the dionate ship at leisure. Okay?"

"Good enough," Das Shamra grunted. The fat blueskin's face was beaded with sweat. Obviously the Martians weren't looking forward to their trip through space — but they were willing to put up with it for the sake of the millions in dionate to be grabbed off Phobos.

Kendall grinned and jammed down the blastoff key. The ship sprang skyward.

H HE HAD HIS BACK to a man with a gun. That didn't make

him feel happier. But the little ship bit a chunk out of the sky, climbed higher and higher.

He heard a groan from behind him, but didn't turn around. He kept himself bent over the controls, forced himself to remain conscious as the acceleration mounted.

Three g's. Four. He yelled over his shoulder, "How you doin' back there? Comfortable?"

There was no reply. He grinned and stepped up the acceleration. Seven g's. Eight. The gravity was tearing at him like a demon's claws, but he clung to consciousness.

A figure ran through his mind:

Mars — gravity, 0.38. He could stand two-and-a-half times as much acceleration as the blueskins behind him. His Earth-trained muscles, used to responding to a much heavier grav, could handle eight g's without too much strain. The Martians must be having fits.

Nine g's. Ten. He turned, looked back for the first time.

Reddish-brown blood trickled from Das Shamra's fleshy lips. The blaster had long since fallen from his limp hand and lay on the spaceship's deck. They were all unconscious — all of them, battered and

beaten by the sort of acceleration an Earthman was able to take with relative ease.

Grinning savagely, Kendall boosted the thrust until he nearly blacked out himself. Then he seized the controls and started to reverse the ship.

Some time later, he landed it neatly outside the Space Service headquarters. Taking a loving look at the Martians, with their wrenched, distorted faces, he scooped up Das Shamra's blaster and opened the hatch.

The computer technician he had fought with before came running out on the landing field.

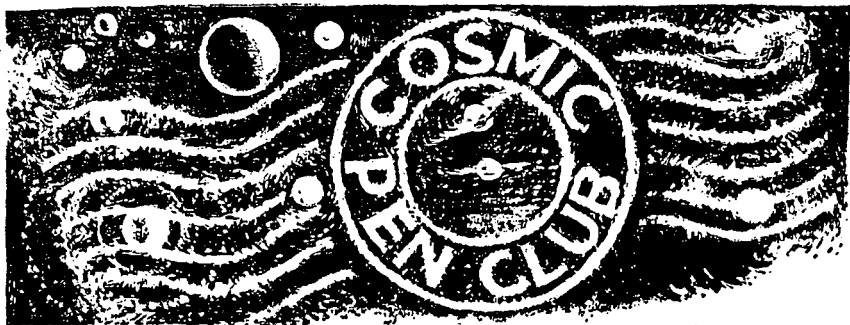
"What is the meaning of this? An unauthorized flight? Who are you? Oh — Kendall!"

"Yes, Kendall," he said, leaning dizzily against the side of the ship.

Jerking his thumb over his shoulder, he said, "Get the Port Police out here on the double. There are six very sick would-be smugglers inside this ship. When you've got our green-faced blueskins packed away, I want another date with that computer. I think I can get an okay now — and I can't get back to Earth soon enough!"

The End

**DO YOURSELF A FAVOR — AND US TOO!
SUBSCRIBE TO "MADGE" — SEE PAGE 130**



A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

STOCK BROKER EMPLOYEE

Alan T. Shelley: 26 7th Ave., Laval West, Que., Canada

Age 18: "I am employed with a stock broker and attend college at night. Have been an s-f fan for some 6 years. Hobbies include philately, camping, and reading; am also interested in astronomy, dancing, pop and light classical music, water sports, and am a fanatic football fan. Wish to hear from anyone with similar interests."

STUDENT

Miss Jan Bryan: 3433 Redding Rd., San Diego 15, Calif.

Age 17: "I'm 5' 4" with light brown hair and blue-green eyes—and am wild over s-f. Would particularly enjoy hearing from other people of all ages who are interested in outdoor sports including swimming and water skiing. Love bowl-

ing, play chess, and enjoy Harry Belafonte. Abhor Elvis Presley. Math, science, and drama are my school majors."

WIDOW

Patricia Kinnan: Rt. 1, Box 148, Packerham Trailer Park, Chalmette, La.

Age 25: "I'm a widow with a 13 month old daughter; I enjoy s-f, horses, dogs, swimming, music (all kinds), people—and just about anything. Would enjoy hearing from anyone."

ART STUDENT

Pat Haines: 5715 Fernwood, Hollywood 27, Calif.

Age 19: "I'm an art major in Los Angeles City College, mad about s-f, and enjoy fencing, reading, sports cars—driving, riding & racing. I would like to hear from col-

lege kids all over who have similar interests."

RESEARCH CHEMIST

Rudolph A. Orosz: 2822 Stanfield Dr., Parma 29, Ohio

Age 37: "I'm married, have 3 children, and am employed as a research chemist. I'm interested in flying saucers, the Shaver Mystery, and psionic machines. Hobbies include stamp collecting, s-f magazines, photography, and radio. Will look forward to hearing from others."

SYMPHONIC MUSICIAN

Miss Zita Carno: 2020 Creston Ave., Bronx, 53, N.Y.

Age 22: "I'm a symphonic musician (pianist-composer-conductor) and an inveterate baseball fan. In s-f my tastes run to humor and ESP, hypnotism, telepathy, and allied subjects. I hope to hear from others similarly inclined."

STUDENT

Gary Cahill: 111 6th Ave., SW, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Age 14: "I'm a student in high school, with interests including s-f, jazz, and girls, in that order! I am interested in corresponding and also in obtaining old issues of s-f magazines."

ASPIRING NURSE

Jo Ann Imms: 665 Osborne Ave., Verdun, Que., Canada.

Age 17: "I am a high school junior,

aspiring to a nursing career. I like hockey, football, and books of all kinds. I would like to write to anyone my age, especially servicemen overseas and otherwise who do not receive much mail. I can also correspond in French."

BOOK COLLECTOR

Kathryn Barr: P.O. Box 4649, San Francisco, Calif.

Age 30: "I am interested in books, and would particularly like to write letters and trade books with anyone in London. I will answer letters, of course, from all foreign and U.S. fans. Also interested in flying saucers, like dogs, reading (of course) music, and record collecting of all kinds."

MODERN SPELLING FAN

Ellen Kahn Crouch: "Casablanca", Sterling, Va.

Age 27: "I'm married, and both my husband and I are s-f fans. I would like to hear from readers who share my interest in revised spelling. I have worked out a system which I call 'Representative Spelling'. Will be happy to send a sample to anyone interested. 'Reespell' as I call it is designed to clear up the ambiguities in our spelling: 'Reespell' must have only one spelling for each sound and one sound for each spelling."

GERMAN STUDENT

Dietmar Schleicher: (14a) Backnang, Hohenstaufenstrasse 14, Wurttemberg, Germany.

Age 16: "I hope you will be able to inform young s-f fans in my age of my desire to correspond with them. I have been interested in s-f since 1954 and am a member of the Science Fiction Club Deutschland. I collect s-f books, magazines, and pocketbooks. My use of English is not the best possible, but I can answer in both it and German."

SAILOR

Gerald L. Pond, HM3/USN: Field Medical School, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Age 19: "Individualist, voracious reader of widely varied diet. My interests range from protozoa through theoretical math to ESP. I like classical music, my favorites being Beethoven and Vivaldi. No Elvis Presley or bop."

STUDENT

Bob Caulson: 301 Chestnut St., Eau Claire, Wisc.

Age 16: "I'm a sophomore in high school, with a major hobby of collecting and reading science fiction books and magazines. I'd like to have a pen-pal my age."

OFFICE WORKER

Miss Barbara Kleinbeyer: 88-37 181st St., Hollis, L.I., N.Y.

Age 20: "I do credit work but hope to be in college soon majoring in social work and psychology. I read most everything and am an amateur short story writer. Cooking is my favorite pastime. I hope to find new pen pals."

STUDENT

Leslie Gerber: 201 Linden Blvd., Brooklyn 26, N.Y.

Age 13: "I like popular music but not the Elvis Presley type. Am a member of an Elvis Presley Hater's Club with a club bulletin called 'The Croaker'. Membership is open to all! Will be happy to write to all s-f fans."

STUDENT

Richard Walters: 5384 Cornwall Dr., Dayton 5, Ohio

Age 13: "I am a high school student, interested in astronomy, science fiction, music, and most aspects of science in general. I would appreciate hearing from others with similar interests."

WOULD-BE WRITER

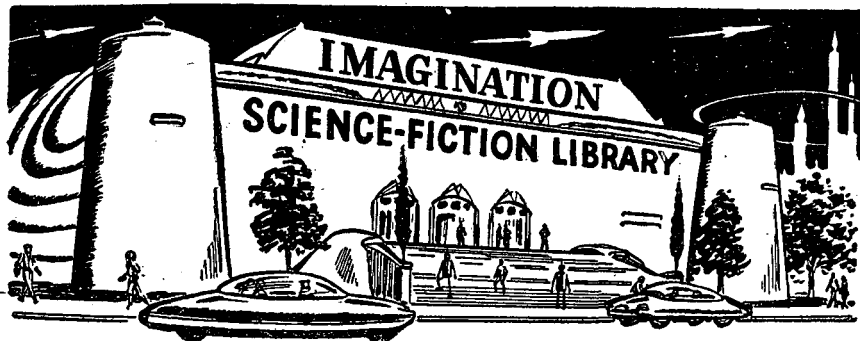
Joseph Martinez: 1140 St. Johns Pl., Brooklyn 13, N.Y.

Age 30: "I'm single, trying to successfully write short stories, with other major interests including science fiction, stamps, flying saucers, and fan magazines. Would like to hear from guys and gals both here and abroad, interested in writing, s-f, or stamps."

STUDENT

John Saseen: 1317 Eoff St., Wheeling, West Va.

Age 13: "I'm a student with major interests in chemistry and astronomy. Hobbies include science fiction and stamps. Would like to hear from others."



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION — 1956

Edited by T. E. Dikty, \$3.50, 256 pages, Frederick Fell, Inc. 386 Fourth Ave. New York 16, N.Y.

With the regularity of the *Britannica Yearbook*, Dikty's anthologies appear, and in an ever-increasing sea of print, they are about as selective.

As always, my personal taste must be reflected in this column; I say that to clarify my choice of and praise for three extraordinarily good pieces.

In order of merit, they are: "A Canticle for Leibowitz" by Walter Miller, Jr., "Dream Street" by Frank M. Robinson, and "The Shores of Night" by Thomas N. Scortia. The first, one of a delightful series which has appeared recently, concerns The Holy Mother

Church and its custodianship of science in a post-atomic-war age—captivatingly blended with medieval conceits.

It goes almost without saying that Robinson's contribution is a superb chase story. It is fine.

Scortia's fondness for literary and poetic allusion makes his tale of remoteness warm as no other tactic could. Generally I am repelled by the super-tale—but not this.

There are other good stories in the book; it is a representative selection of today's "Best."

Dikty's preface "The Year in Science Fiction", is an astute measure of science fiction—past and future. Alas, if all anthologies could be as entertaining as this—but there are few "bests" . . .

REALITY UNLIMITED

by

Robert Silverberg

**It was to be the last word in theatre fun;
you experienced the action as if you were there.
The trouble was — the fun could become too real!**

IT WAS GOING TO BE the show of the century—absolutely the tops.

There was a line eight blocks long outside the theater—the theater that had been specially built to contain *Ultrarama*.

Paul Hendriks had been in line since early the morning before, and so he was only a block or so from the still-unopened ticket-booth. His wife had come by from time to time, bringing sandwiches and coffee. Hendriks was determined to get a pair of tickets.

He turned to the man next to him. "Got the time?"

"Five to nine."

"That's what I thought. That means the ticket-office opens in five minutes." Hendriks rose on tiptoe and squinted ahead. "There must be five hundred people ahead of us."

"They say the theater holds five thousand."

"I know. And that you get the same effect no matter where you sit. But still, I'd like to be right down there in the front."

The other man nodded. "That goes for all of us."

Hendriks grinned. "You know, this is the first time I ever heard of an opening performance being managed right. I mean, thrown open for public sale instead of being reserved for bigwigs."

"Damned public-spirited," the other agreed.

Suddenly the line began to edge forward.

"They're selling tickets!"

"The booth is open!"

About an hour later, Hendriks plunked down his twenty dollars before the efficient-looking girl in the ticket-cage and was handed a



bulky envelope.

"These my tickets?"

"That's right, sir."

A little puzzled, but happy, he turned away and dug in the envelope. He pulled out, not the familiar pasteboards, but two costly-looking sumptuous engraved invitations on thick stiff paper. They said:

You are invited

*To the first showing anywhere
in the world.*

of

U L T R A R A M A

*the sensational new film process
realer than life!*

*Wednesday, April 25, 1973
at 8:00 PM*

Clutching the invitations as if they were his leases on life, Hendriks stepped into the quiktrans and moments later stepped out again just outside the door.

His wife was waiting for him, with an expectant look on her face.

"Did you get them?"

"I sure did! Two engraved invitations, at ten bucks a throw."

"They'd better be worth it," she said anxiously.

"Didn't you see that line when you brought me breakfast? *Eight blocks!* Hundreds and hundreds of people all trying to get to see the first performance."

"That doesn't mean a thing," she said. "After all, no one's ever

seen the complete movie—"

"It's not a movie," he corrected.

"All right, the complete what-chamacallit. No one's ever seen the complete thing—not even the people who made it. So how do you know it's good?"

"Believe me, honey, this is going to be the greatest ever!"

ON WEDNESDAY, April 25, 1973, at 7:30 in the evening, the Hendriks stood in the midst of a vast crowd that thronged the open plaza before the Ultrarama Theater. The theater itself was a towering edifice that had been built just for this production; it was one of the world's most impressive buildings.

"All-right, all right," a policeman shouted. "Ticket-holders come this way. The rest of you stay back."

They cleared a channel through the mob and the Hendriks, along with several hundred other early arrivees, followed along to the door of the vast theater.

"What are all these people doing here?" Mrs. Hendriks asked.

Her husband shrugged. "Maybe they plan on crashing the gate—or possibly they think there may be some tickets left. I tell you, we're awfully lucky to be where we are right now."

He extended the invitations to a

tall, haughty-looking doorman in a resplendent uniform. The doorman merely nodded and gestured them inside.

"Don't they tear up the tickets?"

"Not on opening night," Hendriks said. "They're letting us keep them as souvenirs."

They stepped inside and found themselves in a vast, almost boundless vestibule carpeted with deep pile synthofoam of a lush purple color. Vaulting arches of gleaming metal swept upward to the barely visible ceiling.

"If this is just the foyer," Paul Hendriks said, "imagine what it must be inside!"

His wife nudged him. "Look—isn't that shocking!"

A girl of about seventeen was coming toward them, smiling cheerfully. Hendriks blinked. She wore only two nearly-transparent strips of shimmering cloth, one over her breasts and the other wrapped round her hips.

"Good evening," she said. "I'm your usher. May I show you to your seats?"

"They really put on a show here," Hendriks muttered. The girl glanced at the invitations he was clutching and beckoned them to follow her. She led the way, twitching her hips invitingly.

A bright aluminoid door loomed before them. The girl touched a

switch and the door slid back, revealing the actual interior of the theater.

Hendriks gasped.

It was nearly the size of a football stadium. Where the playing field should be were seats, elaborate plush pneumatic affairs. And ringing the seats was the Screen.

The Screen covered the entire walls, floor, ceiling. It hemmed the audience in completely. As Hendriks took his seat, he felt totally surrounded by it.

They waited impatiently for the half hour to pass. The theater filled up rapidly, with first-nighters in all their finery.

"I'm glad we wore our formal clothes, dear."

"Yes," Hendriks said, looking at the others. "This is quite an event. Quite an event."

THE THEATER was totally filled by 8 P. M. sharp; the corps of near-nude usherettes performed their job swiftly and efficiently.

And suddenly a voice said, "Welcome to ULTRARAMA."

It was a cultured, soft female voice—and it came from so close to him that he glanced in surprise at his wife. But she was looking at him. She had heard the voice too.

It continued: "You are about to

witness the most spectacular form of entertainment ever conceived by the mind of man. Twelve years of concentrated work went into producing what you are about to see—and no one but you will experience it. Each of you will be *taking part*; each of you will, as the series of scenes we have assembled unfolds, be caught up in the reality of ULTRARAMA—the *realer-than-reality* Ultra-reality of ULTRARAMA. Shall we begin?"

The lights in the theater dimmed—and the vast screen came to life.

It was incredible.

And they were in Africa.

The huge plains of South Africa opened out before them. Hendriks turned his head, looking around in astonishment. The audience seemed to have disappeared. He was alone—alone in a world of yellowing grass and strange thick trees, a flat world where death could strike at any moment.

In the distance he saw four grotesque shapes—giraffes, moving along in their ungainly but yet tremendously rapid way, their long necks projecting stiffly from their bodies. He repressed a chuckle.

And then a low growl made him jump. He backed against a rough-barked tree and felt sweat cascade down his body as a tawny shape sprang from behind a twisted shrub, pounced on one of the gir-

affes, smashed the fragile neck with a fierce swipe of a paw.

The lioness. Sudden death springing from nowhere, a bright streak that brought violence. Hendriks looked around uneasily. The giraffes had fled; the lioness was dragging her kill into the underbrush. The warm smell of death was in the air—that, and the buzzing of green-eyed flies an inch long. Perched on a scrawny, almost leafless tree were hooded ugly shapes.

Vultures. *Are they waiting for me?*

This was *too* real. This was *unbearably* real.

A herd of gazelles came bounding out of the background, relieving some of the tension. The lovely creatures seemed to float along, touching the ground only at occasional intervals. Behind them marched the dull-gray bulks of a herd of elephants, shambling with a ponderous gait.

This was Africa. This was the real thing, Hendriks told himself. It wasn't a show. Through some magic the ULTRARAMA people had actually sent him here.

He moved away, investigating. A sluggish black stream wound through the jungle; curious, Hendriks walked toward it. Dark logs lay strewn almost at random in the shallow muddy water at the

sides of the stream. But as he watched, one of the logs yawned, showing a double row of deadly teeth, and slid sleepily off into deeper waters.

Crocodiles. Death threatened everywhere in the jungle.

Monkeys chattered overhead; bright-plumaged birds flapped from tree to tree. Hendriks felt the heat, his nostrils drew in the smell.

This was real. He wondered if it would ever end, if he would ever return to his neat little city apartment and to his wife and children.

He glanced away from the stream, looked up at the sun blazing in the bright blue sky. And abruptly black death came roaring at him from a tree.

Hendriks had just a moment to recognize it. A leopard, black, sleek, moving with the easy grace of a machine designed for killing. He toppled backward under the impetus of the beast's furious attack, smelled the soft musky smell of the killer.

Then claws reached for his throat. Hot barbs of red pain shot through him. He screamed out, fought, tried to hold the snapping jaws away.

"No! No! It isn't real! Get away from me!"

And in that instant Africa vanished.

"THE SECOND ILLUSION," that soft voice next to his ear said.

He was again alone, in an unfamiliar room. A lady's boudoir, he saw. A satin-covered spread lay over a wide, inviting bed; dressing-tables were laden with perfumes and cosmetics.

Behind him the door opened. A woman entered.

He had never seen her before. She was tall, dressed only in a filmy negligee that barely concealed her long sleek legs, her firm breasts. She was all he had ever wanted in a woman; she awakened desires that had been dead in him for twenty years.

"Hello," she said. Her voice was throbbingly throaty. "I've waited a long time for you, Paul Hendriks."

How did she know my name?
How—

Then he stopped asking questions. She had glided close to him, stood there, bosom gently rising and falling, looking into his eyes. She was nearly as tall as he. He smelled her enticing perfume.

"Come," she said, taking his hand. She led him toward a chaise longue.

He frowned. "But my wife . . ." he murmured, feeling like seventeen different kinds of idiot as he said the words.

"Your wife, is happy where she is. Come to me, Paul."

She drew him down beside her. . .

What seemed like hours went by. Suddenly—he felt a rough hand grab him, awakening him.

A stranger stood there, fully dressed, menace glinting in his eyes. "Who is this man, Louise?" he demanded.

Wide-eyed shock was evident on the woman's face. "But—I didn't expect you until—"

"Of course not." Hendriks watched in horror as the newcomer drew a gun from his pocket. He lifted it; the barrel seemed to point directly at Hendriks' eyes. The finger began to tighten on the trigger—

"THE THIRD ILLUSION," said a soft voice.

And he was holding a billowing net and a strange three-pronged weapon. The sound of a roaring multitude reached his ears. He blinked, orientating himself to the new illusion, and saw that he was in an immense stadium. Curiously-garbed people were staring down at him.

My God, he thought. The Coliseum!

And even as the thought of recognition burst upon him, he saw his opponent advancing over the bloody sand. It was a swarthy,

broad-shouldered man in a leather tunic, wielding a thick, short sword.

Swordsman against netman. It was deadly, deadly.

Hendriks knew enough history to be aware of what was expected of him. He had to ensnare the swordsman in the net and kill him with the trident before that fierce sword could pierce his heart. It was anything but an equal contest, but with proper agility—

The sword flashed on high. Desperately Hendriks parried it with the hilt of his trident and whirled the net through the air. The swordsman laughed and leaped back.

Hendriks advanced, looking for an opening. The roars of the crowd were deafening. He swung the net tentatively, readying himself for the cast. Tired muscles throbbed in his arms and thighs.

The swordsman retreated deftly, smiling. He looked confident. Hendriks began the cast.

Suddenly the sword flashed again. It was a lightning-fast attack. Hendriks managed to get the trident up to protect himself; the impact sent pain coursing up his arm, and, numbed, he dropped the three-pronged weapon. Laughing jovially, his opponent kicked the trident far across the stadium and advanced with the sword.

Hendriks knew what he had to do. He dropped to his knees before the advancing swordsman and gestured toward the audience.

The swordsman nodded. He lifted the sword, held it over Hendriks' head, and looked up at the grand dais. Hendriks looked up as well.

The thumbs were down. Emphatically so.

The sword began to descend—

"THE FOURTH ILLUSION," said the voice.

He was racing madly down the Indianapolis Speedway, bobbing along at nearly 150 miles an hour in a flimsy-looking little racing auto. Blurs whizzed by on all sides.

Ahead of him he saw a car suddenly swerve into the embankment and burst into a mass of flames. With desperate urgency he yanked on the wheel, tried to avoid the pileup—

And failed. He felt his car going end over end into the air, and shut his eyes, waiting for the explosion that would follow.

"THE FIFTH ILLUSION," the voice said.

He was in a prehistoric jungle; strange stumpy trees were all around, lush vegetation. A slow-moving beast of immense size was thundering away from him, its tiny head close to the ground snapping up vegetation without

cease. Overhead a leather-winged flying reptile moved through the air in jerky swoops.

There was sudden thunder behind him. He turned.

Through a haze of giant mosquitoes he saw a mountain of a beast advancing toward him, tiny forepaws clutching the air, vast head opening to reveal foot-long teeth.

He started to run, but even as he did so he knew it was fruitless. In the steamy jungle sweat poured down him like summer rain. The hot breath of the tyrannosaur was only feet behind him.

Hendriks turned, looked up. The mighty jaws were opening; the knife-like teeth beckoned.

"No!" he screamed "No!"

Suddenly all went blank.

H HE SAT IN NUMBED silence for an instant, realizing he was back in the theater.

The voice in his ear said, "There will be a brief intermission before proceeding with the remaining half of the program. Please remain in your seats to avoid confusion. Thank you."

Hendriks shook his head wearily; he was dizzy, utterly exhausted. His stiff white shirt had lost all its starch. He was bathed in sweat. His hands shook. His fingernails, he noticed, had been chewed to

the quick. He felt as if he had been to hell and back.

He finally mustered enough strength to look over at his wife. She was sitting back in her plush chair, utterly beaten. He glanced around the theater. The other first-nighters were sitting in attitudes ranging from glassy-eyed exhaustion to complete nervous breakdown.

"The second part of the program will begin in three minutes," the pleasant voice said.

"Oh, no it won't" Hendriks muttered out loud. His voice sounded like a harsh croak in his ears. He seized his wife by the hand; she felt cold, clammy.

"Let's go, Dot. Let's get out of here."

She came to life and nodded in silent agreement. Weakly they tottered down the vast aisle, past the pretty near-nude usherettes, through the huge vestibule, out into the coolness of the night air and the relative peace of the city.

There were still some people gathered outside.

"How is it? Real nice?"

"Is it over?"

"Hey, you leavin' so soon?"

Hendriks ignored them. He hailed a jetcab, helped his wife in, staggered in himself. He gave the driver his address.

"You comin' from the Ultrarama show?" the driver asked.

Hendriks nodded.

"Swell thing, ain't it? It's supposed to be *real*; and I mean *real*!"

"It sure is," Hendriks agreed. He leaned back and tried to relax. His nerves were still quivering like overtaut harp strings.

"It's quite a thing," he said. "But not for me. I'm going home. I'm going to take a nice calming shower, a sedative, and get in bed. Then I'm going to read a nice quiet book. How about you, Dot?"

She nodded. "*That's* real enough for me," she said.

THE END



Target Mapping



GEOGRAPHY is becoming more than a grade school subject these days. The ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) which both Russia and the United States are striving for furiously, is not

as useful as desired, unless you know the location of the target at which you expect to strike.

Unfortunately the United States is very accurately mapped; the location of every point of interest is

accurately pin-pointed by coordinates, and the Russians know these coordinates.

Also unfortunately, the state of the surveyor's art is much more primitive in Russia and our geophysicists and astronomers are unable to give coordinates for many potential Russian targets.

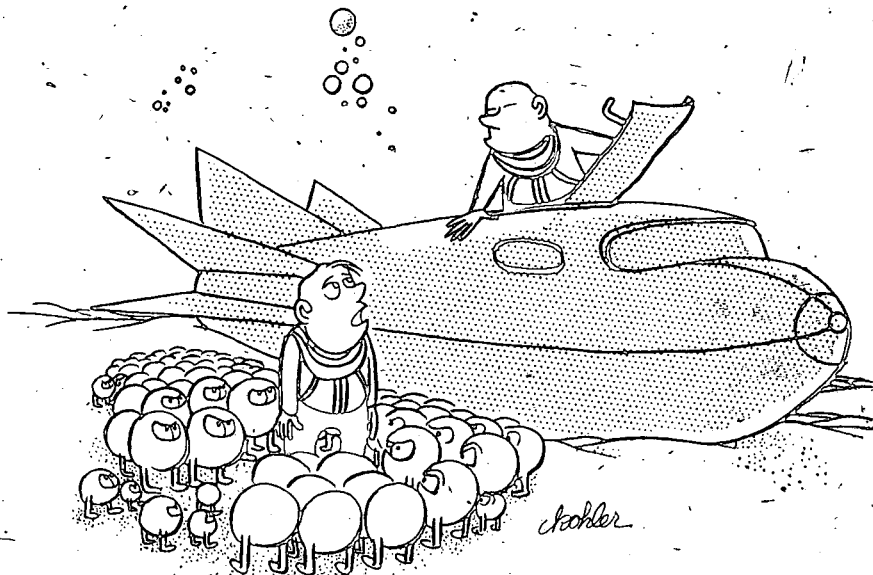
Since Russia does not permit foreign aircraft except in a very restricted way, there is no simple way to obtain information on the latitude and longitude of Russian cities. Nor are the Russians publishing this data.

It is evident that accurate knowledge of Russian geography is going to depend on the satellite program.

Eventually, when satellites reach the status of miniature space stations, the mapping of places in the world will be easy. Until that time, what techniques can be used to pin-point Russian cities can only be guessed at.

Extremely high-flying rockets with heat and photographic sensors might be useful. The use of hyper-sensitive radioactivity detector might be another way. And of course range and direction finding electronic apparatus might be another way.

In view of the situation it is not too difficult to understand why the Strategic Air Command likes the idea of manned aircraft.



"Deleters the flowery phrases, they want us to get the hell out."

Flight Into The Unknown

by

Tom W. Harris

It was Bailey's first trip into space and things began to happen that made him wonder if luck alone would bring him back to Earth alive!

... A hand moved. ...

Young Bailey fell. It was a terrible sensation, falling. Bailey was not sure how long he had been falling. There was no one near him. They had been scattered like seeds from a burst pod when the meteor hulled the ship. Bailey was falling through the dark alone; he had been falling endlessly.

... Those with him now were all palefaced with fear. ...

The voice of Krotzer was still in the headphones: "... closing in on me, I can't describe them, you've got to get here. ..." Krotzer had meant so much for so long; now his voice was less than nothing. Bailey was falling like a stone; the sensation drove everything else out of him. Bailey could not stand it any longer, and began to scream.

It shattered his visor and icy space rushed in. There was light

and his captain was looking at him. Captain DiCredico was shaking him.

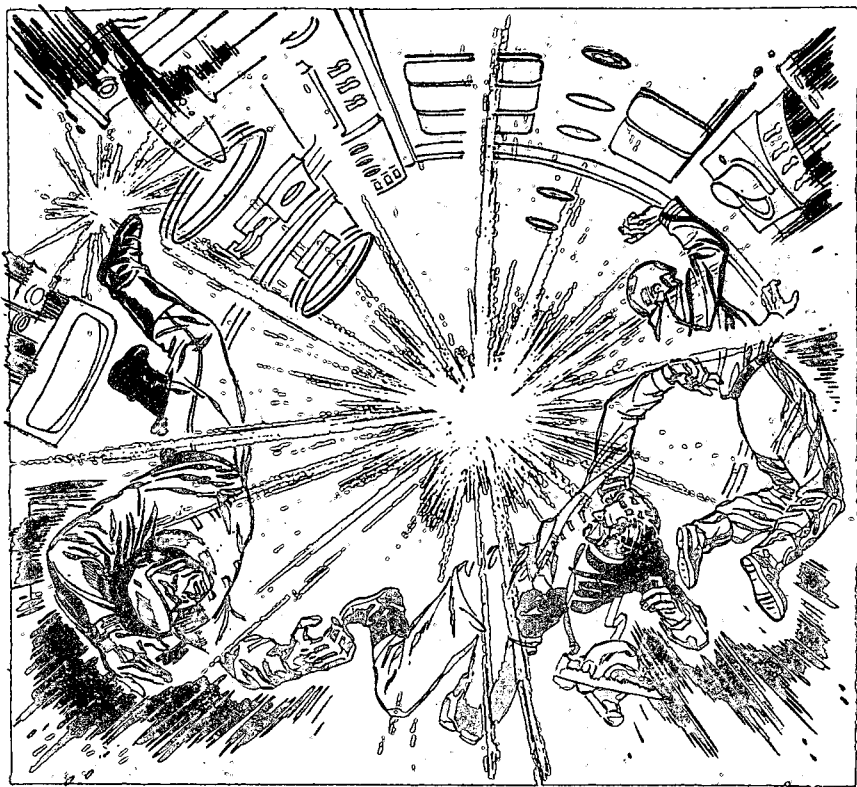
Bailey's face was dripping. He grabbed the skipper. "I'm falling! Hold me!"

... Thousands of eyes bulged, hands twitched. ...

DiCredico squeezed a plastic bottle, squirting water into his face. Drops spattered and drifted off slowly through the air. Bailey blinked and stared. He was aboard the Ranger. Safe. Then panic came gibbering back at him as his body told him unmistakably he was falling.

"You're not!" snapped DiCredico. "No gravity, remember? Spin ship!" he ordered over his shoulder.

Gently, Bailey's body felt the reassuring tug as centrifugal force duplicated a light gravity and the alarm bells in his nerves and



glands stopped ringing. The hull of the ship became "down," and men walked instead of floating—walked on the walls and ceiling, too, like wheel-spokes radiating from the axis of spin.

"Over it?" asked DiCredico.

"I guess so. I'm sorry."

"Happens to all of us. Human body is made with a built-in, full-scale emergency response to fall—lack of gravity is what

triggers it. When you're awake you can consciously control it. I'm going to have to quit spinning ship now—can't take bearings, and this slant-standing can be worse than no gravity."

The substitute gravity faded and Bailey's body tried to panic again, but he reined it in firmly. He went forward to watch television. It was the same canned show he'd seen ten times already. And the

canned radio show was one he hadn't liked in the first place. The Service did its best to make a ship a synthetic, miniature Earth—but it couldn't. Ten months already—maybe a year more. Plenty of people blew their stacks. A wonder they all didn't. Would he?

Like black, bad blood, a pulse of fear in Bailey's mind.

...and in those others that were his...

-It was time for his stint on radar. Benning handed him the headset gratefully. "Krotzer's still sending," he said. "Awful to listen to. Whatever they are, they're doing something to his bubble. He thinks they may be in soon. I hope to Christ we get there."

"What do you think they are, anyway?"

"Beats me," Benning answered. "Looks like you'll see some grade-A monsters your first time out, you lucky boy." An unconvincing smile crossed his face, which like all their faces was dead white from months of being away from anything like sunlight. "A lot of lousy things can happen in space. I hope we get less than our share of them."

BAILEY SNUGGED the headset over his ears. The voice of Krotzer was weaker. Bailey pictured him crouched in his bubble, his radar broken and only fit for

sending, wondering if any lonely ship at all was hearing him, and if it was, if it would arrive in time. Krotzer had a wife, and a child he had never seen.

Now he was talking about the things outside the bubble. "I never saw anything like them. In fact, I can't see them. Can't exactly. You can see them with your feelings, somehow—hooded sort—and beginning to come through..."

He broke off, started again. "This is Captain Krotzer of the *Galileo*. We have crashed on Katharinē Two, satellite of Saturn, continental area. Something has killed five of us. Chan Lee and I are living in the bubble. Cannot receive you on disabled radar. Be-seigned."

He stopped. The headphones were silent except for the uncanny snickering static of deep space. They sometimes called it "laughter." It was not good for the nerves. It was as though space itself were cackling at them, thought Bailey. Get off that. Think about something else.

He remembered Krotzer well, an expert on extra-terrestrial life, a man with a face mingling sensitivity and courage. He had lectured once at Prelim. Bailey remembered some of it. Almost imperceptible, living crystals that swarmed in the air of one planet. They got into your system, con-

verted your matter, and you suddenly crumbled into a heap of the same kind of crystals. And the unknown life of the planet Caliban, called the Shunned Planet because of some influence that reached out and sucked ships down by doing something to the minds of the men. And the singing smoke droves. And the dissolvers. And others.

... A shudder in the mind of Bailey and the other same minds. . .

Krotzer was beginning again: "This is Captain Krotzer of the . . ." when there was a blinding white flash and the ship rang like a great bell slammed with a sledgehammer. A spurt of white-hot blasted into the compartment and Benning, who had been near the bulkhead, cartwheeled with hands to his seared face.

A wild horse of fright leaped inside Bailey and he wanted to tear off the headset. Above the alarm bell DiCredico was yelling. "Pinhead meteor. No danger. Jones, Alvarez, help Benning. Bulkhead will seal itself, men, it's only a pinhead meteor."

Bailey's ears rang. A tiny, immensely fast meteor had hit, been vaporized, the coagulant between the inner and outer shells had sealed the hole. His spine itched. Did the little one mean they were near a swarm where they might catch a big one?

His answer was a modulated

mechanical keening from the proximity teller, up forward.

He glanced at DiCredico for the don-space-suits order, but the captain was floating forward fast and wordlessly. To control himself Bailey gave his attention to the radar. All he heard was the insinuating laughter.

The teller was howling like a hound in hell. DiCredico emerged from the forward compartment, his short bulk ungraceful in the air. "Don suits!" he ordered. "We're in a swarm!"

Matt wrenched off the headset and launched himself toward his suit rack. He scrambled into his suit, dogged down the helmet, and sound and fire burst through the ship.

He was lifted and slammed against a bulkhead. Black fire belched behind his eyes. He had a flashing vision of the backyard of his folks' home in Pittsburg, and a dark curtain fell over it.

... Everywhere they had a vision of their home in Pittsburg. A black curtain fell over it. . .

When he opened his eyes he saw he was alone among a crew of death. They hung in their space-suits against the bulkheads like limp grey bats while the ship tore on through space. Two had failed to get their helmets on. Their faces were bruised plums, mottled. Inside their bloated chests, the lungs would

be pink froth, literally having exploded with the instant drop in air pressure. A third man's suit had ruptured up the front, the raggedy edges flayed back like skin. The man was swollen like one long drowned.

There was no air. It had rushed through the barrel-sized hole in the hull. There was only one hole—the meteor had burst on impact and not passed clear through. Chunks of stone, ribbons of blood, scraps of metal hung quiet or floated above the deck.

Matt had never told anyone how he felt about space. It was a freezing, heart-killing loneliness that waited icily, and now it had come in through the hull and was with him. His jaw clenched. He had no idea whether he could carry on alone, but he was going to.

Then one of the grey bats stirred, drew up its legs, and launched itself off the bulkhead. The others began to move. A laugh rolled in Bailey's throat. Like him, they had only been stunned.

They froze the encapsulated dead and patched the hole as best they could and found a clock still running and re-set their instruments, and each man had a souvenir piece of meteor stone, and less than two weeks after this was done the boredom dropped over them again as though excitement had never been.

The tension about their mission to Krotzer, tighter from hour to hour only made it worse. They began to hate each other's mannerisms, the way a person scratched an ear or cleared a throat. It's getting you, Bailey, Matt told himself. This way men go nuts.

...Go nuts, echoed the minds that were him without knowing. Go nuts...go nuts...go nuts...

IT WAS AFTER CHOW that he did it. He walked over and turned off the television. All kinds of emotions stood on the faces of the others. Rage was the one on the face of a hulking man named Regan.

"It was right at the best place!" growled the big spaceman. "Turn it on!"

Matt placed himself directly before the screen. "Turn it on yourself!" he baited, with a twisted smile he meant to be lightly humorous.

Regan shoved from the wall and floated slowly toward him.

"There's a reason for watching this stuff," one of the crewmen put in, "I tell you we've got to watch it! Turn it back on, son."

Matt laughed. "What a stinker. The Space Service! Glamor! Commentators and books and slogans and kids and girls all talk about it like a hero carnival but it stinks, it's a bunch of guys going nuts on

the other side of nowhere and—”

Regan hit him. He flew backward, seeing stars, rolling in the air. DiCredico's voice gonged from the captain's cabin.

“Knock it off! Regan, turn the set on, get back to the entertainment. Bailey, want to see you in here.”

It all went out of Bailey and he felt foolish and frightened. He swung into the cabin and floated at attention.

... They were all a recruit, frightened before DiCredico. . .

It took DiCredico ten minutes to get through his talk with Bailey, speaking in tough, slicing sentences. The service was no bed of roses, said the skipper, and nobody in the service had ever claimed it was. It was a damned mean racket and nobody asked you to get into it. You volunteered. And you didn't have to stay. Before each voyage you could ask for honorable discharge, or earth duty if available. But once you blasted off, you had to stand the gaff. You had to.

There were men who cracked. There were whole crews. If one man lost control, another might, and finally all of them. Nobody knew how many flights were lost through “mental hazard.” There were shrewd guesses.

Bailey could make the Ranger another missing ship. And they weren't on freight nor patrol—they

were on a rescue mission. He should think about that.

You had to learn to use the television and the other corny “entertainment”—let it soak you up, take you away for awhile.

He could have Bailey put under dormisol, so he'd sleep through the rest of the trip. But he was needed. But he could request it, and DiCredico would do it.

Bailey did not request it. He went back and shook hands with Regan, who was very decent about it all, and sat down to learn to use the television.

Things were a little better after that.

... And they relaxed a little, the many that were one. . .

Krotzer's reports kept coming in, and they were nearing the unknown satellite. Everyone felt a little numble-witted because the meteor patch was leaking and pressure was low. DiCredico kept a tight routine and they leaned into it for support.

Finally a little red globe appeared on the viewer, and they were approaching Katherine Two.

They followed Krotzer's bearings and they saw his ship and near it the bubble. Nobody responded when they fired flares.

The Ranger touched down. DiCredico took Bailey, Regan, and the medic Fry out with him. Conditions were similar to earth, and

they wore no space suits.

They swished through red waist-high growths like spongy fern.

"There's his ship," said Fry. "It doesn't look in bad shape."

"Can't tell," said DiCredico. "Funny things happen."

They reached the ship and paused by it. It appeared unharmed. A body lay near it, burned in two.

Matt turned to the skipper. "It looks like—like a heater did it. Do you suppose these things have something like that?"

"Funny things happen," said DiCredico. "Anyway, he's dead. Let's get on to Krotzer."

They saw that Krotzer had half-opaqued his bubble. They would have to come in close enough to see and be seen through it for him to know they were there. Nobody saw any indication of life or motion outside it.

"We'll give it a wide circle," said DiCredico. "See if there's any visible danger."

It took twenty minutes to make the circle. Nobody saw anything.

"Something's damned queer," said Regan.

"Something's always queer," said DiCredico. "Now, here's the plan. Get your suits on. From Krotzer's reports, whatever is after him is stopped or impeded by material substance. Then we go in one at a time. I go first. If nothing happens to me, Regan comes

in. If he makes it, Bailey. Then Fry. If anything goes wrong, I want the man with next turn to try the other side of the bubble. Except you, Fry. If you're the only one left, get back to the ship. You'll have to make a report, and you and the men can decide the next step. Dig?"

They nodded. DiCredico sauntered off through the spongy feathers. He reached the bubble, looked in, waved on Regan. Regan reached it, peered into it, turned and waved to Bailey, an odd expression on his face.

BAILEY STARTED ACROSS the red field. Aloneness, menace, strangeness settled on him as he walked. Maybe you got used to these feelings. Maybe you got over them. Maybe they got you. Or maybe something else got you. So this was the service.

He was at the bubble. Fry and DiCredico were looking at him so strangely . . . partly expectant, appraising, ironic — indefinable. Matt turned to wave Fry on, then went up and peered into the bubble.

Then he knew what had happened to Captain Krotzer.

The captain sat with his shirt undone and dirty, his eyes fixed glassily to a place on the dome some twenty feet from where Bailey stood. Unkempt beard was on his

face. A blaster lay on the table. The bodies of his crew lay about him.

Krotzer held the radar mike, his lips moving monotonously.

It must have smelled terrible in there.

Space was the monster that had got Krotzer and the crew of the Galileo, moving in on them with icy probings until one of them had cracked.

Bailey felt a hand on his shoulder. Fry had arrived. The medic gazed into the dome. They went over and sat near DiCredito.

"We may as well go in and get him," said their skipper. "Try to be easy on him."

Matt Bailey felt something breaking inside his chest. Maybe it would grow back, maybe it wouldn't.

... They felt something breaking inside his chest in all the rooms in Minnesota and Bloomsbury and Hong Kong, and then there was a separation and they were no longer Bailey but themselves, watching a thin man stand up beside a desk.

"I am Wilson Bonner of World Tele," he said. "You have just witnessed the world's first kinevision broadcast, and you may have your brains back. Practically everybody on earth tonight was Matt Bailey—although there is really

no Matt Bailey at all.

"Perhaps you expected something more pleasant from your first kinevision, and your government owes you an explanation. You are aware of the progress of space flight research. We have achieved planetary escape. There is wild optimism. The space ministry has been swamped, clogged, with space-ship volunteers..

"It was time for realism.

"Matt Bailey was a synthetic personality. We invented him. We fed personality factors into a calculator, and we also fed into the calculator some highly informed guesses about just a few of the conditions likely to be encountered in space flight.

"We used the calculator to project the neural reactions of the synthetic person, Bailey, under the assumed conditions.

"Through kinevision, these sensations were reproduced in you.

"I need not labor the point. Space flight will be no Sunday outing. You deserve to know that—to know it with your feelings as well as your brains. And especially you young men should know it—you who are thinking about joining the volunteers. Frankly, we hope some of you will not volunteer. For though there is no Matt Bailey, there will be, someday, soon."

THE END



Conducted by Robert Bloch

FOR MANY YEARS NOW, I've been mounting my soap-box at meetings, at conventions, in the pages of fanzines and even in prozines, to proclaim one simple statement—"Fans are people."

Certainly this isn't a very profound observation, and it shouldn't be too difficult to understand. As a matter of fact, a portion of the general public has gradually come to accept the truth of this observation. Formerly, outsiders usually pointed the finger of scorn at fans with the observation, "Dig that crazy mixed-up kid," or even, "Dig that crazy mixed-up adult".

But the phrase is *passee*, and so is the thought behind it. Despite the attitude of a die-hard minority, it's easy to observe that most people are becoming increasingly tolerant of fandom as a hobby and are willing to consider fans as individuals.

Surprisingly enough, the great-

est resistance to this new ~~new~~ seems to come from the ranks of the fans themselves.

I reach this conclusion ~~reluctantly~~, but the evidence is unmistakably apparent in the pages of all too many fanzines these days. It is most marked whenever fans have occasion to refer to BNFs.

Just what is a BNF? According to the learned authority Tucker, in his NEO-FAN'S GUIDE:

"The 'Big Name' Fan", the person who is well-known and who has made a solid reputation for himself. This is usually accomplished by participating in fannish affairs for a long while, or by publishing a superior fanzine, or by consistently writing or illustrating in a manner identified with quality, or, by any number of ways which keeps your name before fandom in a responsible manner. The term 'BNF' has to be earned, it can never be ap-

propriated or purchased, nor conferred upon yourself or your friends."

In other words, a BNF attains his or her status through *performance*.

That is how we judge human beings—by their performance. Actions speak louder than words.

At least, almost everywhere except, apparently, in fandom. All too many fans, when considering this BNF matter, seem to forget the definition cited above. They seem to forget the performance factor. And that's why I hold that they are not judging their fellow-fans as *people*.

Now it is not my intention to imply that the term BNF is possessed of any signal merit in itself; it is not the equivalent of a knighthood, an honorary Ph.D from a College of Mortuary Science, or a membership in the World's Most Exclusive After-Shaving Club. To be known as a BNF is not quite on a par with becoming a Thirty-Second-Degree Mason, a Grand Imperial Dragon of the KuKluxKlan, or Chairman of the Board in a lumberfactory. BNF is a complimentary term in our little sewing-circle, yes, but it means nothing except to a few other sew-and-sews.

I don't think it is a Sacred Honor, and I don't believe it should be jealously guarded, reserved for only a Select Few, and awarded on the basis of a three hour examination (written) for males and a three hour examination (physical) for females.

But I do think fandom is inclined to kick around the term until it is in danger of losing even a modicum

of meaning; and this simply because fans aren't willing to evaluate other fans as *people*. And to gauge them, as people, on the basis of their actual *performance*.

Pick up a fanzine, almost any fanzine, and see how many references are made to BNFs. The woods, apparently, are full of them, and so is the woodwork. A few issues of a fanzine, a half-dozen articles in the fanzines of other editors, and a fair number of letters circulated amongst prozine outlets or private correspondents seems to qualify an individual, in the minds of far too many fans, as a genuine BNF. Even though the individual in question may put out a run-of-the-mill 'zine; his "articles" may consist merely of reviewing other fanzines or gripes against prozines; and his correspondence more distinguished by invective rather than invention. Indeed, quality and quantity alike seem to be minor factors—what seems to matter is just how loudly and emphatically the fan states his adverse critical opinions.

As a result, we have self-styled and seemingly accepted BNFs who earn their apparent status merely by participating in feuds: we have BNFs whose choice of language and statement of opinion offer no value but shock-value: we have BNFs who have presumably arrived at this distinction merely by using a reverse-switch on the old "guilt-by-association" idea and associating themselves and their activities only with other BNFs.

But the criterion of worth, I respectfully submit, is in the value of services rendered. *Value*, not *volume*.

And once we re-appraise the BNFs in terms of value, in terms of actual performance and contributions to the fan-field, the ranks diminish quickly. It's very easy to separate the men from the boys.

Now let me hasten to add one thing: that "men from the boys" phrase is figurative and not literal. Nor does mere seniority mean anything in fandom; it's not necessarily length of time spent in the field that counts.

IN MY OWN personal estimate, people like Lee Hoffman, Dean Grennell, Walt Willis and Shelby Vick became BNFs in only a year or so of fanning, because of the tangible contributions they made to the field. Whereas it is possible (if not exactly polite) to name a good many people who have "been around" fandom for a half-dozen years or even longer, and who show no signs of ever being capable of attaining BNF status.

Now just what "tangible contributions" make a BNF? According to the broad terms of the Tucker definition almost all fanactivity will enable an individual to qualify—if this activity is identifiable with "quality" and keeps your name before fandom "in a responsible manner."

Within the broad confines of the field, almost anyone can write, anyone can illustrate, anyone can publish, anyone can correspond, anyone can form a club or hold a so-called "convention" or start a so-called "movement." But when we consider the matter of *quality* and the degree of *responsibility* we can make a sound judgment.

It's not my purpose here to attempt to make a listing of all those who—in my opinion—are rightfully entitled to the designation of BNF. But I would, perhaps, help to illustrate the basic premise by citing a few examples.

In my own opinion, then, I'd classify as BNFs all those who have made an effort to provide fandom with a written record—historical or definitive; who have attempted to give fandom a frame of reference and a sense of continuity. In this category one brings to mind Sam Moskowitz and his IMMORTAL STORM, Jack Speer and the FAN-CYCLOPEDIA, the aforementioned Bob Tucker with his NEO-FAN'S GUIDE and his FAN-SURVEY; also Don Day and his INDEX and (on a slightly more professional level) Messrs. Dikty and Bleiler with their compendium. If the people mentioned above had done absolutely nothing else within the field, these signal contributions would be enough to stamp them as true BNFs—even if they never once came out in the pages of THE CRUDZINE QUARTERLY with a Fearless Letter pillorying Palmer, hamstringing Hamling, goading Gold or crucifying Campbell.

Similarly, I'd grant BNF status to everyone who has ever been a prime mover in putting on a successful regional or national Convention. It's not necessarily the Chairmen I'm thinking of, either, but the *real* workers—whether or not they happen to hold titles. Oftentimes they aren't active in the editing-publishing aspect of fandom, but their contribution to the field as a whole is a major one. Dr. C.

L. Barrett is, of course, a name that comes instantly to mind. Doc is certainly a BNF, although he has never put out a single copy of a 100-page Annish.

I'd also classify as BNFs those who, through the years, have demonstrated willingness to perform services over and above the call of duty in connection with furthering the growth and development of the various APAs. I am not thinking so much about the people who get their kicks from quibbling over "constitutions" and interpretations of "bylaws" as I am about fans who have held office in such organizations and stimulated real activity on the part of the membership. The same would hold true for the fanclubs throughout the nation.

In the field of actual fan-publication, I defer to Mr. Tucker with his reference to a "superior fanzine". Here again, quality and responsibility are the *criteria*; not quantity and volume. After a dozen years, people still remember (and, if they're fortunate enough to own copies, cherish) Laney's THE ACO-LYTE; Lee Hoffman's, QUANDRY was, and is a distinctive effort; an all-too-infrequent SKYHOOK from Redd Boggs is still worth a hundred issues of (*fill in your own choice, who needs trouble?*). That is not to say that it's impossible to make a valid contribution with frequent issues: certainly the award-winning, FANTASY-TIMES offers ample demonstration to the contrary.

The same, I think, holds true in the matter of writing *for* fanzines. Bob Silverberg's famous piece of a few years back which resulted in

the still-disputed birth of a still-disputed Seventh Fandom is a case in point: there had been nothing to equal its effects since Dr. Frankenstein created his monster. Consistently good writing—serious or facetious, sf-oriented or devoted to other interests—can make a BNF. Take a look at Harry Warner, or Dean Grennell, or the work of many contributors to 'zines such as INSIDE, PSYCHOTIC, or OOPSLA for further evidence.

But in this connection, let me once again emphasize the fact that fanzines, while they are a fairly accurate mirror, lack the scope to reflect the *entire* aspect of fandom. It is possible (as in the case of Dr. Barrett) to become a BNF without ever editing, publishing, or writing for a fan magazine. I stress this merely because it is in the pages of fanzines that one generally comes across the distorted notions of what constitutes BNF status.

Let me repeat, at the risk of reiterated redundancy (to say nothing of alarming alliteration) you don't get to be a genuine BNF just by spreading your name around and getting people to know you. There's a lot of difference between mere notoriety and real recognition.

If name-noise alone could do the trick, then one of the outstanding BNFs of 1955-56 would be Joan Carr, the distinguished editress of FEMZINE. How quickly Joan Carr became a fake BNF! A fake in every sense of the word, because the distinguished editress is now an extinguished editress, upon revelation that "Joan Carr" was a hoax perpetrated by Sandy Sanderson. Indeed, Sanderson is one of the few

who may be rightfully entitled to BNF status by virtue of a hoax alone—since that hoax so deftly demonstrates the difference between actual achievement by an actual person and false claims by a fakeroo.

In a sense, as I tried to say when I started out, all this is very unimportant. Since the term BNF carries with it no tangible reward and no actual prestige save in a very minor field, it can quite easily be dismissed as being of no consequence, no matter to whom it is applied.

But on the other hand, fandom does have a value as a cross-section of human relationships. Many a youngster has grown up (and, let us hope, many more will grow up) in the field. The friendships they cultivate there, the experiences they undergo, and the judgments about effort, worth and rewards they make as a result of what they find in fandom renders it important that we emphasize the difference between mere labels and actual performance. It is important, too, that we all realize that becoming a BNF is not the end-all or be-all of fan-activity. There are plenty of people around who don't necessarily want to become Big Wheels—they're quite happy merely to go along for a pleasant ride. As such, they're more than welcome, and their company is more appreciated; fandom is the kind of vehicle that moves better with a full load of passengers, and there's no need to expect that everyone must serve as conductor or engineer; sheer interest is ticket enough for the trip. Our only dispute is with those who claim a place in the engineer's cab without

really helping to stoke the boiler—they blow a loud whistle, but they don't get us anywhere; and I'd better drop the analogy right now before we end up on the wrong track.

But here's a switch. Let's look at fanzines.

FOCUS No. 4 (Mervyn Barrett, 6 Doctors Commons, Mt. Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand: irreg.: 15c) gives good indication that New Zealand fandom has grown by leaps and bounds ever since they managed to deport Boyd Raeburn. FOCUS contains all the standard ingredients of a typical American fanzine, tastefully assembled: fiction, articles, poetry, fan magazine and pro magazine reviews, and a letter column featuring Ellik and Boggs. The editorial columns contain surprisingly up-to-date information on the field, and from the looks of things, all's well in Wellington, with plenty of new zeal in New Zealand. Not a "must" magazine as yet, but an interesting one which shows definite promise for the future.

HYPHEN No. 17 (Walter Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, Northern Ireland: irreg.: 15c) is, as most of you must know, the most famous of British fanzines. You'll find most of the leading and misleading lights of Anglo-fandom in the pages of the present issue—Walt Willis himself, wife Madeleine, James White, John Berry, plus others represented in the letter-column, along with such Stateside and Canadian representatives as Larry Stark and Bob Shaw. There is also a contribution by neo-fan Eric Frank Russell. As usual, it's fanciful, fast, and very funny, and

should be studied closely by anyone, who intends to visit the London Convention this fall.

TWIG No. 2 (Guy E. Terwilliger, 1412 Albright St., Boise, Idaho: irreg.: 10c) is a newcomer which offers much of interest in the present issue, including a review of '56 in the prozine field by Vic Fletcher, a history of the "good old days" by Herbert E. Beach, and a collaborative effort by the two of them which lists and describes dealers in sf books and back-issues of magazines. Lots of positive opinions and solid information.

ABERRATION No.1 (Kent Moomaw, 6705 Bramble Ave., Cincinnati 27, Ohio: irreg.: 10c) is another newcomer, and is frankly a miscellany of think-pieces by the editor, Mark Schulzinger, Bob Coulson, Carr and Rike, together with a single piece of fiction by Larry Sokol. This shows signs of developing into an interesting 'zine—particularly if readers disagree with the viewpoints of some of the articles and offer rebuttals. For the serious, controversial fan.

BRILLIG No. 6 (Lars Bourne, 2436½ Portland St., Eugene, Oregon: irreg.: 10c) serves up something called "the Bloch issue", so how can I be objective? Fortunately for prospective readers, there's nothing by or about Bloch in the 'zine, which carries a miscellany of interesting contributions by Eric Bentcliffe, Guy Terwilliger, Larry Sokol, Agatha Grey Southern and the editor. So don't let that "Bloch issue" tag scare you off.

SIGMA OCTANTIS No. 6 (John Mussells, 4 Curve St., Wakefield, Mass.: irreg.: free samples) is

plugging the First Annual Fandom Fiction Contest in this issue, plus specimens of fan fiction, reviews, articles, and poetry. Another diversified job, verse included.

It hardly seems possible, but there have been 48 issues of YANDRO (R. and J. Coulson, 407½ E. 6th St., N. Manchester, Indiana: monthly, 10c or 12/\$1). The present example, therefore, is the Fourth Anniversary Issue, and a big fat one, too. Most of the regular contributors are represented, there's a handsome colored cover by Marvin Bryer, and a fine science fiction calendar—a generous offering from two people who have given generously of themselves to fandom during the past several years. You know, I always feel just a little bit fatuous when it comes to handing out one of these smug verbal pats on the head to folks who have put in so much time and effort on a project such as this. In an age of spectator-sports, it's so easy to sit back and play the role of audience and critic; we're used to dismissing everything from a one-line caption to a four-hour movie epic with a glib, "Good job" or a snide, "It stinks". But when we stop to consider the amount of honest-to-Willis hard work that goes into the veriest crudzine, it's pretty hard to adequately express appreciation of an enduring project. The Coulsons, like many other fans, have really devoted a lot of lives to the somewhat evanescently-rewarded task of affording pleasure to their fellow-hobbyists; thousands of man-hours of labor, in fact. All I can say is, it's appreciated.

MAGNITUDE No. 4 (Ralph Stapenhorst, Jr., 409 W. Lexington

Drive, Glendale, Cal.; quarterly: 10c) is a well-designed photo-offset job in the digest size such magazines generally assume. Twenty pages, this issue, including a story by Ronald Voigt and two articles, in addition to the regular features and columns. Artwork is nice, too, and there's just one personal quibble—when so much time and expense is put forth to present an attractive product, why waste two full pages on as feeble a joke as the so-called "special feature"?

RETRIBUTION is at hand for the fifth time (John Berry, 31 Campbell Park Ave., Belfast, N.I.: irreg.: 25c), with lots of cartoons by co-editor Atom. This is the Goonique fanzine which features fanfiction revolving about the activities of the fabulous Goon Detective Agency. This time around the honors go to a bloody American name of Dick Ellington.

SPHERE No. 2 (L. A. Christoff, P.O. Box 196, Cantonment, Fla.; bi-monthly: 20c) is still gathering steam, and interested me chiefly for its inclusion of an article by Gerry de la Ree in which he gives the history of his polls on the subject of space-flight. The editors hint that they may, in future, come up with a selection of NYCon photos, and otherwise indicate their intentions of expanding the 'zine.

Out of 417 Ft. Hunt Road, Alexandria, Virginia comes the voice of Richard H. Eney, proclaiming (in a brochure, not a fanzine) that he is currently gathering material for another FANCYCLOPEDIA. He, Andy Young, Redd Boggs and Walt Willis are planning the project: a list of subjects is given and sug-

gestions for additional topics to be covered are solicited. If you feel in a position to help with this task—a huge one, but certainly one of the most worthwhile in the entire fan-field—you might drop Eney a line and get a topic-list. Since the publication of the first FANCYCLOPEDIA by Jack Speer, over a decade ago, many new terms, personages and happenstances have arisen in science fiction fandom, and it's certainly high time that a new and definite edition be prepared. As noted before, the original FANCYCLOPEDIA definitely established its creator as an alltime BNF and deservedly so—a lot of work goes into such a project but the results are certainly rewarding.

If you have a fanzine file and can use it to help Eney and his co-editors to trace the source of phrases and ideas current in fandom these ten years past, you are advised to get in touch with him pronto. Progress of the work will be reported in this column.

THE NEW FUTURIAN No. 6 (J. Michael Rosenblum, 7 Grosvenor Park, Leeds 7, England: irreg.: exchange) offers the ATOM cover which is *de rigueur* for all British fanzines. Beneath it is a wealth of material on British fanhistory—including a photo-page insert from the 1937 Leeds Convention featuring Arthur C. Clarke, Eric Frank Russell, Ted Carnell and others. Joe Gibson muses on the future, Harry Warner, Jr., muses on music, Bob Pavlat amuses on the NYCon; lots of interesting offerings here.

While speaking of England, this is as good a place as any to remind you of the progress being made by

the Committee of the 15th World Science Fiction Convention, scheduled for London over Labor Day Weekend. Secretary Roberta Wild informs me that a new hotel has been selected for the event, with such attractions as a resident bar open 24 hours a day, no restriction on parties, and complete occupancy by the Convention alone. Rates and meal costs are surprisingly low (room and three meals a day for less than \$5) and of course the Anglofans are going all out to plan a big Convention. Send your \$2 membership fee to Roberta Wild at 204 Wellmeadow Road, Catford, London, S.E. 6, England.

Now we come to the third Annish of UMBRA (John Hitchcock, 300 E. University Pkwy., Baltimore 18, Md.: 7 times a year: 10c). Ber-

ry, Eney and Noah McLeod deliver typical material: Lars Helander delivers a message from Sweden (and you're just lucky this column isn't being written by Ackerman, because he'd probably call it a Swedish massage; that's the rub). Plenty of letters, reviews and candid opinions, plus—thanks to the use of the hectograph—some purple prose.

Speaking of purple prose, I remember Tucker's face the night he drank rubbing alcohol, and—

Just time left to tell you that the Midwestern will be held June 28-29-30 at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. Send reservations direct, and bring your swimming-suits. Particularly all you females. The swimming pool is approved by Dunking Hines.

—Robert Bloch

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Letters from the Readers

GUESS HE LIKES US ...?

Dear Old Man Hamling:

April MADGE positively brilliant. All the stories superb. I never expected to find such a marvelous array of authors in one issue of any mag. This particular issue puts you at the TOP of my list.

Now to the letter section. I wish to voice sympathy with Janice Jacobson. But only on the point of having letters slashed to pieces by the editor. I have experienced this same disheartening act.

Now to defend poor Walt Hassett who has been besieged by all feminism (all 22 of them). I understand, Miss Janice, that you say O! WLH won't print fem letters. Blasphemy, Jan. Compiled in three different mags I've just finished reading are a sum of three fem letters—all of them in *Madge*. Along with these three fem letters are five letters from the superior sex: I think wlh is being more than fair.

Now, Missy Jacobson, about that remark about *Madge* not being the

greatest thing since man climbed down out of the eucalyptus trees. People have been hung for less. Please confine your insults to the likes of Mr. Hassett and wlh.

Well, so much for the uprising of the rank and file (mostly the latter). I don't think Walt needed any help after all, do you, "Hamey"?

Most humble apologies if some of the terms of endearment applied were offending.

One last suggestion for Jan: if you're going to continue writing the type of thing which "Happy Ham" let by, I suggest you get a pair of shoes with reinforced toes. Hmmm?

Allen Mardis, Jr.
433 W. Wilson Ave.
Bement, Ill.

We're highly flattered ... we think. Huh?

... wlh

JANICE RETURNS

Dear William:

This letter is mainly to clear up the misunderstanding about what I said before.

You seem to have the impression

that, if I had my way, I would have you flogged to death for so much as touching a word of my deathless prose. Actually, this is not true. If you are going to print my letters, I don't care how much you cut out, so long as what you leave in is said the way I said it, with no little additions of I's here and there, and subtle changes of phrasing. If it can't be done that way, leave it out. If I am going to make a fool of myself I'd prefer to do it in my own terms.

Seems Hassett is spoiling for a fight. Well, I am not going to give him (or you) one. I said it and I'm glad.

Ignoring the letter section for awhile, I say that getting Bob Bloch to do FANDORA'S BOX was one of the best things you have done in a long time. The man is wise and witty. Around here we all get a bigger kick out of his column than anything else in the magazine (except Hassett).

Now to the stories in the April issue: BRING BACK MY BRAIN! was an excellent method of killing twenty-odd minutes; I don't think it would hold up on re-reading.

Of the rest, only SECRET OF THE PAINTING was even mildly interesting. The cartoons were, as always, enjoyable, especially the one on page 103.

COSMIC PEN CLUB looks like a good bet, but, seeing the luck which I'm having with the letter column, I'm not going to apply for it just now. It doesn't do to change nooses in mid-air, you know.

Janice Jacobson
2430 Garth Ave.
Los Angeles 34, Cal.

Guess your luck has changed; didn't hardly edit your letter this month. Ah, well, mebbe next time. wlh

CRITIC CHECKS IN

Dear Bill Hamling:

I'm an amateur critic, am I? Well, I think that you'd better keep Dwight V. Swain—he's a genius. His BRING BACK MY BRAIN! was better than an Alexander Blade novel, above COMPETE OR DIE! (Feb. ish) tied with FOREVER WE DIE (Aug. '56) and, maybe, LAST CALL FOR DOOMSDAY (Dec. '56) which really was hot, by the way.

I honestly believe that all the shorts for April were better than they've ever been before—if IMAGINATION must have a compliment. THE OLD MAN was undoubtedly S. M. Tenneshaw's best to date.

Another compliment. Madge's illos are really something, but the cartoons are funnily terrible.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

Nice. Critique us again soon . . wlh

PLEASANT REPORT

Dear Bill:

Just wanted you to know how much I enjoyed the April issue of Madge.

The cover was beautifully painted, although it didn't stick very close to the story.

BRING BACK MY BRAIN! by Dwight V. Swain was excellently written and well plotted. Thus, I am looking forward to his THE

HORDE FROM INFINITY in the May issue of your companion mag, IMAGINATIVE TALES.

Second best was SECRET OF THE PAINTING by Bob Williams. When can we expect a novel from this writer?

SLAUGHTER ON DORNEL IV was also good, and THE OLD MAN by Tenneshaw was enjoyable with its surprise ending. All in all, a fine issue.

One more thing. Do you have a new Hamilton novel coming up? It's been too long since the last one.

Bruce Taylor
168 Alling St.
Kensington, Conn.

Ed Hamilton has the lead novel, WORLD OF NEVER-MEN in the July issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES, now on the stands. He also has a great Madge novel coming up right away, THE SHIP FROM INFINITY. We honestly feel that this latter novel is one of the finest he's written. So watch for it . . . wlh

NEWYORCON BOOKLET

Dear wlh:

Just a note to let you know I enjoy Madge very much. I often wonder how many of your readers buy extra copies each issue. They come in very handy when you wish to trade with other fans. I usually get 2 or 3 at the newsstand as I have many requests for back issues. I am manager of the N.F.F.F. TRADER, which is published every other month. N3F is an s-f organization started back in 1941.

The NEWYORCON is past history, but fans interested can still get a copy of the NEWYORCON MEM-

ORY BOOK at \$1 a copy. It has 160 pages of mimeographed material, printed covers, special plastic binding, fanzine combozine, and a NYCON I (first Con) report by Jim Taurasi of "Fantasy-Times". It will be a collector's item shortly.

K. Martin Carlson
1028 Third Ave., S.
Moorehead, Minn.

For those not familiar, the NEWYORCON mentioned here is the World Science Fiction Convention held in New York last summer. For any who were not able to attend the festivities, this memory booklet should prove quite interesting . . . wlh

FEM-FEN PROBLEM

Dear Bill Hamling:

I thought I had been buying all the issues of IMAGINATION as they hit the newsstand but I guess I missed one because I do not recall the Janice Jacobson letter that started all the feuding in your April issue. If the letters you printed are an indication of the ones that were too hot to include, your office must be lined with asbestos!

I keep reading references to the S-F Convention in New York. Are they regular affairs? Are they ever held in the West? I'd like to attend one sometime if they ever get within a comfortable distance so that I wouldn't have to leave my kiddies too long.

I have read science fiction for at least 15 years, and never before written a letter to the editor, but if Walt Hassett thinks all us females are lethargic I guess I for one will write to straighten out HIS thinking.

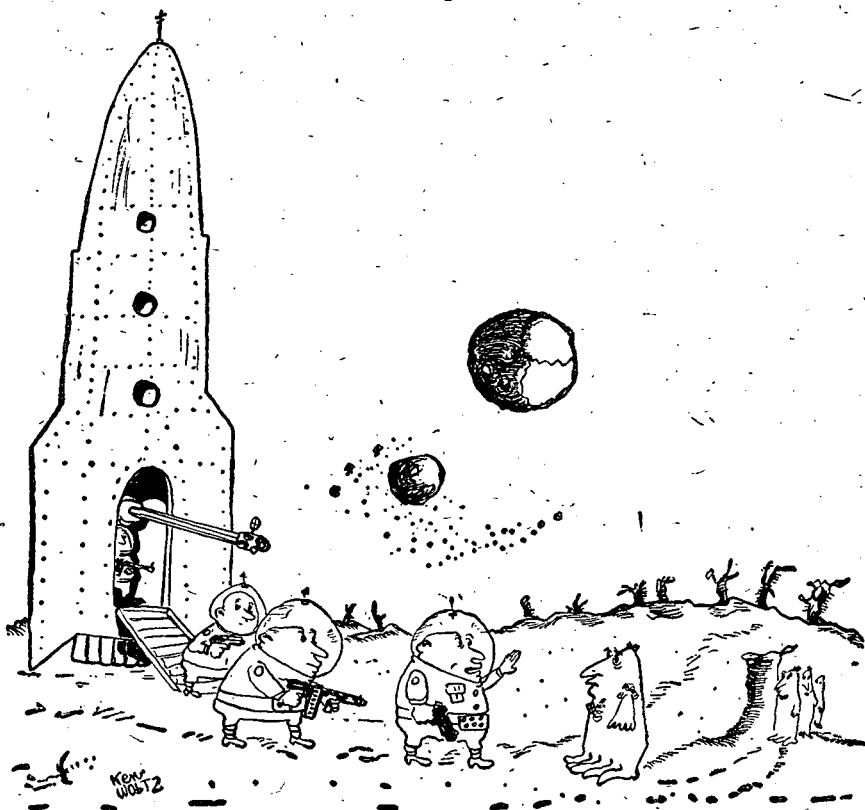
Most of the gal readers, I imagine, are also wives and mothers. We like science fiction but many times we have to grab a moment between catching the baby before she wedges herself under the bed and pulling junior off the bookcase. Then there is the cooking, laundry, patching, sweeping, dusting, and so forth so that many times it's an

effort just to write to members of the family let alone magazines.

So I ask, where do we gals find the time?

Mrs. Charles Wilson
658 S. 5th East
Brigham City, Utah

Science Fiction Conventions are held once a year, usually over the Labor Day Holidays. This year the



"We come in peace."

place is London, England. Next year will be decided at the London convention. Cons have been held many times in the West. Portland, Oregon, Los Angeles, San Francisco . . . Knowing how difficult it is for most gals to find time to write us, we always appreciate a letter from a fem-fen. Hope the chores allow for an early followup! wlv

SECURITY "EVILS" . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

One day I would like to read a story in your great (by your own admission) magazine portraying the security officers and organizations as a positive force, applied to safeguard and perpetuate a democracy, such as the FBI and Secret Service.

I of course refer to Dwight V. Swain's melodramatic little opus, **BRING BACK MY BRAIN!** (April Madge) which pictures security officers as evil-minded, greedy dem-

agogues interested only in personal gain. In reality, there are many conscientious security officers, such as J. Edgar Hoover, yet many s-f writers cling to this same hackneyed theme, as a Communist clings to the Fifth Amendment.

Byron Rowe
4730 Richardson Ave.
Bronx 70, N.Y.

Your criticism of the type of plot you mention is unfounded. Matter of fact, in most novels or stories wherein security officers or organizations are used, the hero is a member and/or officer fighting the threat to Earth or what-have-you.

We might add that in these stories the security forces representing the "good" side are normally the democracies. The adverse side of the picture which you comment on concerns security forces such as those fostered by dictator-states and their bed-fellows in the corrupt government category. That type of security force—secret police, etc., is certainly to be frowned upon. We're sure you agree. . . . While Madge is certainly not a magazine for other than entertainment we cannot pass up the opportunity of commenting on Mr. Hoover whom you mention. In our humble opinion this country is indebted beyond repayment for his services. It is only to be regretted that we don't have the secret of immortality so that men such as he could continue to serve indefinitely. We can, however, rest easy in the knowledge that the organization he personally founded will remain to carry on his work when he steps down. No man, of course, is indispensable, but JEH comes close! wlv

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BACK IN THE FOLD

Dear Bill:

I wanted to tell you what a wonderful thing you have in *Madge*. The April issue, I'm speaking of. It was my first *Madge* since the November '53 issue. Boy, is my head-hung in shame. If I had known *Madge* was going up to that high a standard all the Martians on Pluto couldn't have stopped me from buying it.

I want to ask you, 1. Get some stories by Harlan Ellison (my favorite author) and 2. Get some illustrations by Dan Adkins (my favorite illustrator). And, as I am about to close this letter, where did you get—or should I say, how did you get Ivar Jorgensen from

AMAZING STORIES?

Richard Brown
127 Roberts St.
Pasadena 3, Cal.

From the November '53 to the April '57 issue is quite an absence, Dick. Anyway you cut it too long a one. Just make sure you never let it happen again! In answer to your requests: Harlan Ellison is now in the Armed Forces serving his hitch, so you won't be seeing much of his material for awhile. He recently had a very fine story, -THE MUSIC MAN in our companion magazine in the men's field, ROGUE. Did you read it? As to Adkins, never heard of him . . . Which winds up shop for this issue. —Hey, gang, turn the page and subscribe! with

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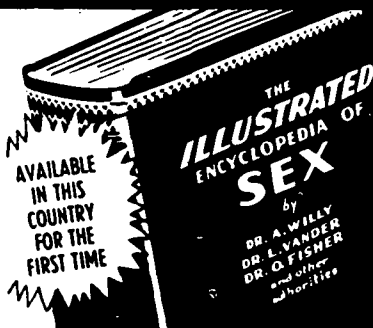
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